

New England Journal of public policy  
15, no. 1 (1999-2000 )  
Periodicals  
K2295.N53 N5  
Received: 10-27-1999

*Fall/Winter 1999/2000*

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OCT 27 1999

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**New England  
Journal of  
Public Policy**

A Journal of the  
John W. McCormack Institute  
of Public Affairs  
University of Massachusetts Boston

## **New England Journal of Public Policy**

A Journal of the John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs  
University of Massachusetts Boston

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Central Reprographics, *Printer*

The John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs is named for the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives from 1962 to 1971. John W. McCormack was born in South Boston, less than a mile from the University of Massachusetts Boston Harbor Campus. The McCormack Institute represents the university's commitment to applied policy research — particularly on issues of concern to New England — and to public affairs education and public service.

The *New England Journal of Public Policy* is published by the John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs, University of Massachusetts Boston. Subscriptions are \$40 per year for libraries and institutions and \$20 per year for individuals. Manuscripts and correspondence should be sent to the *New England Journal of Public Policy*, John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125-3393 (telephone 617-287-5550; fax: 617-287-5544). See Guide for Contributors on inside back cover. Articles published in the *New England Journal of Public Policy* are abstracted and indexed in Sociological Abstracts (SA), Social Planning/Policy & Development Abstracts (SOPODA), Sage Public Administration Abstracts (SPAA), Sage Urban Studies Abstracts (SUSA), and Current Index of Journals in Education (CIJE).

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ISSN: 0749-016X

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# Editor's Note

Padraig O'Malley

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When you receive this issue of the *New England Journal of Public Policy*, we should be crossing the threshold from millennium mania to millennium madness. The former has concerned itself almost exclusively with the etiquette of millennium rites, where one ought to be on the occasion itself — embracing the starlit grandeur of the ancient pyramids, as if to remind ourselves that some things preceded the outgoing millennium and even exceeded the achievements of our own: in the silence of a Tibetan monastery to contemplate in serenity the philosophical implications of the momentous transition and reflect perhaps on the meaning of life itself, the imponderables of the seamlessness of eternity, the indivisibility of a universe that continues to confound our attempts to unravel its mysteries, or, as members of the less esoteric masses, part of worldwide revelries linked by satellite feeds that promise little more than massive hangovers on the first day of the new millennium.

Millennium specials abound, all customer-designed to ensure that all wishes, fantasies, daydreams, and whatever exotics can be squeezed onto the millennium smorgasbord of the once-in-a-lifetime experience can be accommodated. Want to be on the remote island where the last sunset of the millennium will occur? No problem. Want to be on the even more remote island where the first sunrise of the new millennium will occur? No problem. Want the right champagne? Problem: there's been a run on the stuff for over a year. Want to make a reservation at a restaurant that specializes in once-in-a-thousand-years menus? Problem: you should have made that reservation back in 1998. Want to have a drink at your local watering hole? Problem: bartenders the world over, it seems, want to join the inebriated mobs, not cater to them. In New York, we are told, even at guaranteed rates of \$600 for bartending on *the* night plus the lavish tips one could expect from the rollicking throngs, there are few takers. Having a boisterous time is more important than seeing that other people are enjoying one.

The lists are being compiled: lists of the millennium best and worst in every conceivable category of human endeavor. Endless treatises are being written on *the meaning of it all*. Pundits scold themselves on the redundancy of their punditry while happily trotting out reams of the redundancies they bemoan as irrelevant: was Attila the Hun really worse than Genghis Khan? Or would Adolf Hitler put them both to shame? (These comparisons are not meant to slight Josef Stalin, who certainly has a place on anyone's list of the best — or worst — mass killers of the period.)

But these are considerations and concerns that pertain to our world: the world of the "haves," the world of the privileged few who comprise less than 20 percent of the world's population and consume more than 80 percent of the world's output.

As a species we haven't particularly distinguished ourselves in the last ten centuries, but then again, in terms of evolution and the endless elasticity of the boundaries of time and space, one thousand years is merely a blip on a continuum that has no beginning and no end, too short a time to attach the significance with which we have endowed it.

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But we do have one singular achievement to our credit. We have — through pure dumb obstinate persistence in the face of formidable obstacles, tenacity of almost unendurable proportions, dedication that goes far beyond the call of any duty, sacrifice that turns the concept itself on its head — managed to perfect the means to obliterate ourselves, not just once but hundreds of times over.

We can make time and space meaningless. In achieving the capacity to annihilate every living thing, we have eliminated the need for a Higher Being, for a God who is the custodian of our lonely existence in the vastness of an infinitely expanding universe. Fallible in all things, we have engineered infallibility at the cost of our ceasing to be. With no memory traces of our existence as receptacles of our having ever been here, we have managed to make life itself an illusion — and we have the conjurers to perform the final act. Only we would not know it to be so.

Memories are not for the present; they are artifacts that allow us to put conceptualizations of the future into some rational context. But rationality is predicated on the assumption that some actions are contrary to our genetically ingrained instincts for self-preservation. We can no longer cling to this comforting assumption. Since the appurtenances of universal self-destruction are proliferating, and we continue in our quest to find ever more refined and cost-effective ways to exterminate ourselves (irrational?), we have come to the end of history — not in the manner Francis Fukuyama envisages in *The End of History and the Last Man*, but in our ability to eliminate self and consciousness of being. History requires memory; with the eradication of memory there is no history. The termination of all life, now or in the coming millennium, terminates all preceding life. It is not a matter of closing the book, but of the book never having been written.

But less of the theology of oblivion, and back to the more mundane. If somehow in the next millennium we manage to navigate the circumstances of our continued existence as a species, we will face one overriding challenge that will, if not met, make that navigation more difficult, given the capacity of even the most meager among us to acquire the means of mutually assured self-extermination.

That challenge is to bring about a more equitable distribution of income and wealth both within countries and between countries, especially between the countries in the northern and southern hemispheres. To our everlasting discredit, there is little evidence that, on a relative basis, we have done much to alleviate disparities of well-being between rich and poor during the millennium about to close — although I emphasize the word *relative*.

Increasingly, we live in a world of the “haves” and the “have-nots.” If the issues of the growing imbalances between north and south and the intolerable burdens of debt with which countries in the southern hemisphere, especially Africa, are overwhelmed or not addressed, the anger, resentment, and sheer desperation that have been smoldering in these countries for decades — centuries in many cases — will ignite into a conflagration of hostility and animosity with unforeseeable and, perhaps, uncontrollable consequences — consequences far removed from the small gestures of impotence that have characterized their pleas for help in the past.

Tired of being perpetual supplicants, feeling isolated in the global economy with its dog-eat-dog ideology, forever having to sanction severe and often counterproductive conditions donor countries and international agencies attach to loans, the poor countries in the south feel abandoned, not part of the global village we love to meander on about but inhabitants of the squatter camps that surround it. Marginalized and forgotten, they

are not in a forgiving mood. Living on the scraps of the world's wealth their well-to-do northern neighbors throw in their direction, they would rather suffer in dignity than swallow silently the humiliations that in the end leave them no better off.

Even in the United States, there is a creeping recognition that something has gone awry. After enjoying an unprecedented period of uninterrupted prosperity during the nineties, with no end to the boom in sight and a stock market that has hit levels no trader in his wildest dreams would have imagined ten years ago, the distortions that the market-driven economy has produced are beginning to undermine some of the fundamental tenets that made America the beacon of hope, the land of opportunity for millions in the past.

According to figures released by a number of federal agencies and research organizations, weekly wages for the average American are 12 percent below their inflation-adjusted levels of 1973; median family household income in 1999 is, in real terms, about the same as it was in 1989; the one percent of the country's highest income earners make more than what 100 million workers earn; the average working week has expanded to forty-seven hours, which, for the average middle-income family, translates into an additional nine weeks of work annually. But the real pay for the extra hours worked comes to a meager \$2.20.

The richest one percent of American households retain 40 percent of the country's wealth. That is double the percentage of wealth they held in 1976. The bottom 40 percent of Americans experienced a collapse of 80 percent in their net worth. The figures on debt burden just get worse, leading Lester Thurow, a professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management to write, "The great American middle class has become a non-participant in the American dream." One wonders where that leaves those not fortunate enough to fall into that class — once aspired to by tens of millions, now a debt trap.

Millennium madness refers to increasing concerns about possible Y2K glitches. Even as evidence mounts that the probabilities of serious glitches are minimal, concerns continue to increase. All may be well in the United States, but what about the rest of the world into which this country is wired? And since perceptions are everything, and people are more prone to believe that more things will go haywire than the government and the private sector would lead them to believe — who after all wants to cry fire in a crowded theater and raise the specter of panic, a mad rush for the nearest exit? — they are more likely to put their eggs in more than one basket, which, of course, leaves open the possibility that we might run out of baskets.

This issue of the *New England Journal of Public Policy* covers a range of public policy subjects, all pertinent to the direction federal- and state-level government will take in the coming decades. I draw your attention to two in particular, not because they deserve any special signaling out because of superior merit, but because each addresses the issue of personal character and public life, already the focus of the 2000 presidential campaign. Richard Hogarty, in his essay on the legacy of Francis Sargent, who served as governor of Massachusetts from 1969 through 1975, prefaces his narrative with an epigraph from David McCullough: "History reminds us that nothing counterfeit has any staying power, an observation, incidentally, made by Cicero about 60 B.C. [in a pre-millennium era, to keep things in perspective!]. History teaches that character counts. Character above all."

This same epigraph would make an ironic preface to Garrison Nelson's essay on the late Speaker of the House John W. McCormack, one of the major architects of both Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal and Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society. The irony is



that according to the norms of today’s custodians of the politically correct, McCormack would not have been judged fit to run for dogcatcher. Nelson also raises a more intriguing question: What is character?

If, perchance, the next issue of the *NewEngland Journal of Public Policy* does not reach you, you may take it that we at the McCormack Institute fell afoul of Y2K. In this event, your copy, written in longhand, will be hand-delivered in due course — that is, if we can find anyone who remembers how to write! ❀



## Irish Identity Politics

## The Reinvention of Speaker John W. McCormack of Boston

Garrison Nelson

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*From his election in 1940 as Majority Leader to his last day as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives in 1971, John W. McCormack of Boston occupied the highest rungs of leadership in the Congress. Many biographies and autobiographies cover the lives and public careers of five Speakers, but not one has been devoted to McCormack — not because he was unimportant and irrelevant. He was a very private man who could rearrange the facts of his life to suit his political needs. The story had great resonance in Boston because its Irish gatekeepers — James Michael Curley, John F. “Honey Fitz” Fitzgerald, Patrick J. “P.J.” Kennedy, and Martin Lomasney — led lives identical to that of McCormack. They accepted the reinvented history and watched him move rapidly up the city’s political ladder. Through a detailed examination of city, state, and federal documents, secular and sacerdotal, in the United States and Canada, a clearer portrait of McCormack emerges.*

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Of the twenty-seven amendments added to the Constitution since 1789, the successful passage of one may be attributed to a single news photograph taken November 27, 1963, five days after the murder of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the thirty-fifth president of the United States. Newly installed President Lyndon B. Johnson was pictured at the rostrum of the U.S. House of Representatives giving his first formal address to the Congress, the nation, and the world.

Two very old white men were seated behind Johnson: to the president’s left, Democratic Senator Carl Hayden of Arizona, the president pro tempore of the Senate, second in line to President Johnson; to the president’s right, Democratic Congressman John W. McCormack of Massachusetts, the Speaker of the House and next in line to President Johnson.

Senator Hayden entered Congress as Arizona’s first elected U.S. representative in 1912, the year his state entered the union. Hayden left the House for the Senate in 1927, serving in that chamber until 1969, when he retired at the age of ninety-one. Speaker McCormack was first elected to the House in 1928 during the closing days of the Coolidge administration and served until 1971, when he retired at the midpoint of President Richard Nixon’s first term, at the age of seventy-nine.

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point of President Richard Nixon's first term, at the age of seventy-nine.

When the photograph was taken, John McCormack was seventy-one and Carl Hayden was eighty-six. Lyndon Johnson, who had served with both men in their respective chambers, was only fifty-five. President Johnson suffered from a well-known heart condition, which had kept him out of the 1956 presidential nominating contest; and it was an ailment that would end his life, at the relatively young age of sixty-four, in 1973.

In his compilation of President Johnson's tape recordings, Michael Beschloss reported, "Many Americans were frightened at the sight of the two elderly men next in line for the presidency behind LBJ, who had once suffered a massive heart attack."<sup>1</sup>

To disinterested observers of the photograph, Speaker McCormack and Senator Hayden seemed to represent the ghosts of "Congress Past." But they had become the ghosts of Congress Present and most likely, Congress Yet-to-Come.

In an effort to diminish the likelihood of either of these two gaining the presidency through the legislated line of succession, Democratic Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana proposed a constitutional amendment entitled the Presidential Succession and Disability Amendment. This amendment would allow Congress to fill the vice presidency if it became vacant and to limit the operation of the 1947 Presidential Succession Act, which placed the Speaker and the Senate president pro tempore right behind the vice president. To hammer home his point about the necessity of the amendment, the fateful 1963 photograph graced the cover of Senator Bayh's book, *One Heartbeat Away*.<sup>2</sup>

It worked, and the Twenty-fifth Amendment was ratified on February 23, 1967, one year and ten months after Congress had approved it and sent it to the states for ratification. The time it took to move through the state legislatures was close to the median of other constitutional amendments. The photograph had alerted, but had not panicked, the nation.

Once the solution had been implemented, Senator Hayden was spared further speculation about his fitness for the presidency. Speaker McCormack was not so fortunate. Questions raised during his tenure continued to dog his speakership, which McCormack had to defend for much of his time in the chair, and motions to oust him surfaced frequently during his last years in the post.<sup>3</sup>

Twenty-eight years have passed since Speaker McCormack left the House and nineteen years have passed since his death, but he remains the least well known of the Speakers of the past half century.

From 1962 through 1970, Boston's John W. McCormack served as the forty-fourth Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Although he was a major legislative architect of both the New Deal and the Great Society, he is still relatively unknown. That was the plan.

It is my contention that John McCormack enjoyed and took pains to preserve his relative public obscurity. He was a very private man in a public office. In the words of his longtime assistant, Dr. Martin Sweig, "John McCormack was the most secretive man I have ever met."<sup>4</sup> Why? Therein lies the tale.

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### The Austin-Boston Speakers

From 1940 through 1989, the House of Representatives had only six Speakers: Sam Rayburn, Joe Martin, John McCormack, Carl Albert, Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, Jr., and Jim Wright. Five were Democrats with Joseph Martin of Massachusetts the only Republican. McCormack and O'Neill were also from Massachusetts, Rayburn and Wright

were from Texas, and Albert was from an Oklahoma district just across the Red River from Rayburn's Texas district.

During this same half century, there were ten presidents and six Chief Justices of the Supreme Court. The presidents were born in eight states and elected from nine. The Chief Justices were born in six states and chosen from five. The Speakers were born in four states but elected from only three.

That an elective political institution with the shortest fixed term of any national world legislature would have so few presiding officers is not the least of the House leadership's many ironies. That a national political institution with a constitutionally mandated requirement that its membership reflect population shifts should have been presided over by members from only three of the nation's fifty states enriches the irony. And that the one Speaker, John W. McCormack, whose public leadership career in that body spanned more than thirty years of the half century, remains unknown to the American public turns irony to mystery. Fourteen biographies and autobiographies cover the lives and public careers of five Austin-Boston Speakers: six about Rayburn, three each for Tip O'Neill and Jim Wright, and one each for Joe Martin and Carl Albert.<sup>5</sup> But none on John McCormack! Is it because McCormack was unimportant and irrelevant to the politics of his time? No. Or because he chose not to share the full dimensions of his life so little known? That would appear to be the case.

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### **John McCormack "in the Room"**

For almost forty years, John McCormack was near the epicenter of political power in the nation. The most fascinating aspect of McCormack's life is not his oft-told rags-to-riches Horatio Algerish rise from the Boston Irish tenements to the Speaker's chair on Capitol Hill but the fact that McCormack was in the room for so many major political events that altered the course of American life.<sup>6</sup>

Consider the following:

- 1928 — John McCormack was elected to the U.S. House to fill the unexpired term of the late Congressman James A. Gallivan, Democrat of Massachusetts, and to the subsequent term.
- 1931 — At the urging of newly installed Speaker John Nance ("Cactus Jack") Garner, John McCormack ran for a seat on the Ways and Means Committee. At the time, the Democratic members of Ways and Means served as "the committee on committees" for the other Democrats. McCormack finished second among the members elected to the new vacancies, ahead of Fred Vinson, Democrat of Kentucky, later secretary of the treasury and Chief Justice of the United States. Vinson was a poker pal of McCormack's.<sup>7</sup>
- 1933 — President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal measures moved quickly through the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee on which McCormack was a senior member. These were the "hundred days."
- 1934 — The House named its first Special Committee on Un-American Activities to investigate native fascist and communist movements. At the urging of Democratic Congressman Samuel Dickstein of New York, McCormack was chosen as chair.<sup>8</sup>



- 1937 — Commerce Committee chair Sam Rayburn, a New Deal supporter, was elected House Majority Floor Leader over Rules Committee chair John J. O'Connor, Democrat of New York, a New Deal opponent, with the help of northern urban Catholic votes provided by John McCormack.<sup>9</sup>
- 1940 — Working closely with conservative Virginia Congressman Howard W. Smith, McCormack helped write the controversial Alien Registration Act, known as the Smith Act, which required all foreigners to register and be fingerprinted. It also made it unlawful to be a member of any organization that advocated the overthrow of the government by force or violence or to advocate or conspire to advocate such overthrow.<sup>10</sup>
- 1940 — Sam Rayburn succeeded Will Bankhead, Democrat of Alabama, as Speaker, and John McCormack succeeded Rayburn as House Majority Floor Leader. McCormack defeated Virginia Democrat Clifton Woodrum in the Democratic caucus with the help of Georgia Democrat Eugene "Goober" Cox, an avowed segregationist.<sup>11</sup> Cox was another poker pal of McCormack's. Once elected, Rayburn and McCormack served as the House's top two Democrats for twenty-one years and never had a vote recorded against them.
- 1941 — Newly elected Majority Leader John McCormack was asked by President Roosevelt to be the House floor manager for the \$7 billion Lend-Lease bill, which was intended to rescue Britain from the Axis powers. The fear of anti-British feelings among urban American Irish Democrats caused the role of McCormack to be considered pivotal in managing this bill through the House.<sup>12</sup>
- 1941 — Majority Floor Leader McCormack introduced the resolution of war against Japan and the other Axis powers, Germany and Italy.
- 1944 — Speaker Sam Rayburn, Majority Leader John McCormack, and Minority Leader Joe Martin were briefed by Army Chief of Staff George Marshall, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, and Director of Scientific Research Vannevar Bush on the Manhattan Project. They were urged to appropriate money for the atomic bomb project without the public's knowledge or congressional scrutiny.<sup>13</sup>
- 1944 — The Democratic National Convention again nominated FDR but replaced Vice President Henry A. Wallace with Democratic Senator Harry S. Truman of Missouri. Senator Truman played poker with Majority Leader McCormack, who chaired the 1944 Platform Committee.<sup>14</sup>
- 1945 — When President Roosevelt died, Vice President Truman received a call from the White House while seated with Speaker Rayburn in the "Board of Education," the Speaker's Capitol Hill hideaway.<sup>15</sup> Majority Leader McCormack had left the House floor to join them, but Truman had departed to learn his fate. Later that evening McCormack and other key officials attended President Truman's swearing-in by Chief Justice Harlan Fiske Stone.
- 1947 — Minority Whip John McCormack circulated a petition among House members to urge President Truman to pardon ex-representative and newly elected Boston Mayor James Michael Curley for mail fraud,



- enabling him to leave prison to serve his fourth term. Many House members signed the petition. Only one Massachusetts Democrat, John F. Kennedy, who had succeeded Curley in the seat, refused.<sup>16</sup>
- 1949 — Majority Leader John McCormack arranged the return of segregationist Democrat William Colmer of Mississippi to the Rules Committee over the opposition of Speaker Sam Rayburn. But at the same time, McCormack, whose committee service was optional, remained on the Expenditures Committee, averting a southern walkout when William Dawson of Chicago was installed as the first-ever black chair of a congressional committee.
  - 1952 — Congressman John F. Kennedy challenged the reelection of the incumbent Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. Kennedy's father, former Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy, was considered a "defeatist" who was too accepting of a World War II Nazi victory in Europe. John McCormack, a longtime favorite of Jewish voters, was known as Rabbi John. He campaigned vigorously for the young Kennedy in the Jewish wards of Boston, helping him to gain a 70,000 Democratic vote plurality over Lodge in spite of General Dwight D. Eisenhower's 209,000 Republican vote plurality over Illinois Governor Adlai E. Stevenson.<sup>17</sup>
  - 1956 — After a losing battle with the Kennedy forces for control of the state party chairmanship, John McCormack won the state's presidential preference primary and led the Massachusetts delegation to the Democratic National Convention when the state's junior U.S. senator, John F. Kennedy, made his failed bid for the vice presidency.
  - 1958 — The Soviets launched Sputnik, an earth-orbiting satellite. When a panicked American nation turned to the Congress for help, the House of Representatives created the Select Committee on Astronautics and Space Exploration and John McCormack was named its chair.<sup>18</sup> Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas headed the Senate panel.
  - 1960 — Senator John F. Kennedy selected John McCormack to manage his nomination on the convention floor. McCormack, a friend to both Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson, helped put together the Kennedy-Johnson ticket, which won the closest election in the twentieth century and installed the nation's first Roman Catholic president. Robert Kennedy and Rayburn opposed the ticket for different reasons. Bobby Kennedy wanted either Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson of Washington State or Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri for the ticket, while Rayburn, aware of Vice President John Garner's unhappiness on the job, tried to spare Johnson of its frustrations. Ambassador Joseph Kennedy wanted Johnson, and McCormack helped deliver him to the ticket.<sup>19</sup>
  - 1961 — With the final illness and eventual death of Speaker Sam Rayburn, John McCormack became the acting Speaker. This same year, McCormack was approached by Ambassador Kennedy with a simple proposition to gain the Senate nomination for his youngest son, Teddy, and a gubernatorial nomination for the Speaker's nephew Eddie.<sup>20</sup> The ambassador's stroke in December voided the deal.
  - 1962 — John McCormack was elected Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, the first Roman Catholic to assume that position.

- 1962 — Ted Kennedy and Ed McCormack engaged in a fratricidal Teddy-Eddie contest for the Senate nomination. A bruising debate at South Boston High School led to Ed McCormack's denunciation of Ted Kennedy, which backfired, and Kennedy gained the nomination by a two-to-one margin.<sup>21</sup>
- 1963 — John F. Kennedy's assassination placed seventy-one-year-old Speaker John McCormack next in line to President Lyndon Johnson for fourteen months. Because that prospect discomfited many Americans, the Twenty-fifth Amendment, allowing the vice presidency to be filled by presidential appointment with confirmation by the Congress, was ratified quickly.
- 1964 — Speaker John McCormack presided over the Democratic National Convention, which nominated President Lyndon Johnson and Senator Hubert Humphrey, Democrat of Minnesota, as its ticket. Johnson and Humphrey captured forty-four states and the District of Columbia with more than 61 percent of the vote, the highest percentage of the two-party era.<sup>22</sup>
- 1965 — Speaker McCormack presided over the House when the first session of the 89th Congress gave LBJ a record-setting 93 percent success rate for his Great Society legislative measures, including Medicare and Medicaid. This session rivaled the 1933 "hundred days" for legislative accomplishment, when McCormack had also served.<sup>23</sup>
- 1967 — Speaker McCormack was sued by ousted African-American Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Democrat of New York, after the latter was denied his seat and the chairmanship of the House Education and Labor Committee. The U.S. Supreme Court granted Powell his seat, but the House refused to let him resume his chairmanship.<sup>24</sup>
- 1969 — Speaker McCormack was challenged within the Democratic caucus by Arizona Congressman Morris Udall, the first to a sitting Speaker since 1923. McCormack won renomination in the caucus handily by a vote of 178 to 58.<sup>25</sup>
- 1970 — McCormack completed nine consecutive years as Speaker, the longest consecutive speakership on record. It remained in place until 1986, when his protégé, Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, Jr., completed his tenth consecutive year.

Why was John McCormack always in the room? The reasons were both political and personal.

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### **The Political Dimension: Containing the Race Question**

On the political level, the longtime Austin-Boston linkage between John McCormack's Massachusetts and Sam Rayburn's Texas was no surprise. Texas is the largest southern state with the smallest black population, and Boston is the largest northern city with the smallest black population. Southerners with few blacks in their districts did not have to engage in racist posturing, which made it possible for them to have Catholic, Jewish, liberal, northern, and even black friends. They could deal with the disparate elements of

the Democratic coalition without an electoral backlash in their districts.<sup>26</sup>

Boston is the northern urban analogue of this phenomenon. The decade-ending censuses of the 1950s and 1960s revealed that the city ranked twelfth in the 1960 Census and eleventh in the 1970 Census in the proportion of blacks in the “core city” of the twelve largest Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas in the country. These were the decades of John McCormack’s power.

Without a sizable number of blacks in their districts, Boston-area representatives were not obliged to become advocates for civil rights issues. As Martin Sweig, McCormack’s legislative assistant, recalled, “John McCormack never made a civil rights speech, but he always voted for civil rights bills.”<sup>27</sup> Voting for civil rights bills would not have antagonized the South; speaking for civil rights would have.

Boston-area members were able to accommodate some of the more vocal and vehement racists who have sat in the House. McCormack’s best friend in that body was Eugene “Goober” Cox of Georgia, a leading segregationist.

McCormack was in a position to negotiate with southern hard-liners without fear of electoral retribution back home. Their ability to finesse the race question was what made the original Austin-Boston speakership of Rayburn and McCormack so powerful. This was because it was — and is — the race question that more than any other has disrupted the Democratic Party.

Presidential politics within the Democratic Party has been plagued by the race question. It was the race question that forced Democratic nominating conventions to adopt the two-thirds rule for selecting their presidential candidates in 1835.<sup>28</sup> This rule, which gave the South a veto over presidential nominees, was maintained for almost a century. It was the race question that led to two separate Democratic nominating conventions in 1860. It was the race question that resulted in 103 ballots at the 1924 convention.

In the postwar years, it was the race question that led to the southern delegates’ assembling after the 1948 convention to create the Dixiecrat presidential candidacy of South Carolina Governor J. Strom Thurmond, the loyalty oath battle at the 1952 convention, the independent elector movement in the 1960 election for Virginia Senator Harry Flood Byrd, and the presidential candidacies of Alabama Governor George Wallace in 1964, 1968, and 1972. The Willie Horton campaign against Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis in the 1988 election was the most recent dramatic example of racial politics playing havoc with Democratic presidential fortunes.

But the House remained relatively unaffected by these issues, and the Democrats were able to hold on to it for sixty of the sixty-four years between 1931 and 1995. Knowing that the race question has been the tiger by the tail within the Democratic Party, the Democratic House leaders sought to manage, control, and contain this most vehement and volatile of all the issues with which the party has had to contend in its lengthy existence. The best way to accomplish this goal was to bring into the leadership the members who could accommodate the race question: representatives from districts that permitted them sufficient flexibility to have friends on both sides of this issue. Members from Texas and Massachusetts — Austin and Boston — met the requirement. These leaders could direct the House of Representatives to contain the race question but not to address it.

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### **The Personal Dimension: Poverty and Probity**

On the personal level, John McCormack was a mainstay in the room because he was reliable. As a lifelong teetotaler, he always had his wits about him and remembered everything. As a Boston Irishman, McCormack could keep secrets. As a devout Roman



Catholic, he valued loyalty above all other virtues. He needed no press attention to feel good about himself. His solid marriage of fifty-one years provided him with all the emotional sustenance he needed. His background of poverty led him to value minor financial comforts and the steadiness of a job that lasted forty-two years. His modesty, his frugality, and his integrity made McCormack the moral compass of the House.

Furthermore, McCormack was a poor boy who had made good, a motif played out again and again among the Austin-Boston Speakers. It is true of Sam Rayburn, whose farmer father uprooted the family from the dwindling fields of Roane County in east Tennessee to the more productive ones of northeast Texas; of Joe Martin, whose blacksmith father made too little money to educate his oldest son; of Carl Albert, whose coal miner father had located in a community large enough to support only a one-room schoolhouse; of Tip O'Neill, who grew up the motherless son of a Boston Irish bricklayer; and of Jim Wright, whose itinerant father roamed through the Southwest as a traveling salesman. The shared hardships of their early lives united these men and sensitized them to the deprivations that continued in America and the role the federal government could play in alleviating them.

But John McCormack's life history was different. McCormack's early hardships were genuine, but the contours of his life were dramatically altered to gain public office in Boston, a city hopelessly fractured by ethnic and religious conflicts. McCormack had often told people of his early life, of a poor Irish-born immigrant father who died young, leaving John, the thirteen-year-old oldest son, to care for his Irish-born mother and two younger siblings.<sup>29</sup>

In a May 18, 1971, interview shortly after leaving the speakership, McCormack recounted his early life. "Well, at the time of the death of my father I was a young man, a boy, thirteen years old. He was a stonemason. The family was left in very bad financial circumstances. I had graduated from the grammar school and I had to leave the grammar school to go to work in order to try to keep the family together. Our family consisted of my mother and two younger brothers."<sup>30</sup>

It was a powerful, frequently retold story. The greatest of this century's Boston Irish politicians — four-time Boston Mayor James Michael Curley, the presumed hero of the classic novel, *The Last Hurrah*, and both of President John F. Kennedy's grandfathers, John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald and Patrick "P.J." Kennedy — had identical stories. The power of this tale of Irish fathers, widowed mothers, and younger siblings had elevated them to positions of high station within Irish Boston.

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### The Boston Irish Gatekeepers

The politics of Irish Boston both before and after the European war was dominated by local factions.<sup>31</sup> Commanding and competing personalities set the tone for Irish Boston's political life. The best-known and most powerful were mayors and U.S. congressmen, John F. Fitzgerald and James Michael Curley, and state senators, Martin Lomasney, the ward boss of Boston's West End, and Patrick Joseph Kennedy, the leader of the most successful machine in East Boston.<sup>32</sup>

Their life histories were remarkably similar.

- From the North End, John F. Fitzgerald — mother, Rose Mary Murray, and father, Tom Fitzgerald, both of County Wexford; both emigrated in the 1840s. Father Tom was a farmer in South Acton and later became a



grocer and liquor store owner in the North End; Tom died three years after Rose's death, when Johnny was eighteen. John was the third of seven boys, two of whom died at an early age. He graduated from Boston Latin but had to drop out of Harvard Medical School to support the younger boys. His first job was as a clerk at the Customs House.

- From the West End, Martin Lomasney — mother, Mary Murray, born in Lismore, County Waterford, and father, Maurice Lomasney, born in Fermoy, County Cork. They married when she was thirty and he was thirty-four. Of four sons, only two, Martin and Joseph, survived. Their father died when Martin was eleven, shortly followed in death by their mother. Martin and Joseph lived with their maternal grandmother, who spoke only Gaelic, and aunt. He left school in the sixth grade to work at a railway station selling newspapers.
- From East Boston, Patrick J. Kennedy — mother, Bridget Murphy, and father, Patrick Kennedy, both born in County Wexford. They were married in the United States and had four children, three daughters and a son. The senior Patrick was dead at thirty-five, shortly after the birth of his only son. Never finishing grade school, P.J., in his teens, began to work as a stevedore and longshoreman; he eventually took over a bar in Haymarket Square and moved into the retail liquor business.
- From Roxbury and South Boston, James Michael Curley — mother, Sarah Clancy, and father, Michael Curley, both from County Galway; immigrated to the United States as teenagers. They married when he was twenty-one and she was nineteen. Of their three babies, only two survived, John and James Michael. Father Michael, a hod carrier, died in 1884 at the age of thirty-four when James Michael was only ten. Young James Michael sold newspapers and worked as a clerk in a drugstore.

Death at an early age befell their fathers and many of their brothers. Their time horizons were not long ones. If they seemed to be young men in a hurry to scamper up the political ladder in search of power and security, one should not be surprised. Early death among their most beloved family members had robbed them of the sense of invulnerability so prevalent among the adolescents from more privileged corners of the city.

These were the men that young John McCormack had to impress if he was to become a player in Boston city politics. It was these men whose life experiences had made them tough and cynical. It was these men to whom John McCormack would present himself and his altered ancestry.

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### **The Reinvention Process**

To escape the desperation of his early life, John McCormack would rewrite his life story to match those of the gatekeepers by ascending to the heights they had already scaled and even surpass them. He would eventually sit in the Speaker's chair of the House of Representatives, ranking only behind the vice president in the presidential line of succession. From the November 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy to the installation of Vice President Hubert Humphrey in January 1965, McCormack was only a heartbeat away from the presidency.

His childhood in Boston was hard. By the time he was seventeen, the annual edition

of *The Boston City Directory* had recorded for the McCormacks fourteen places of residence within a six-block radius in Andrew Square, a rough-edged crossroads linking South Boston to Dorchester. In an area filled with three-deckers and tightly packed houses, one ricocheted around Andrew Square to beat the rent. Landlords' tolerance for families grown beyond their incomes was never great. How many other places the McCormack family had occupied during these years is unknown, but there is little doubt that these moves were made a day in advance of the landlord and two days ahead of the sheriff.

Before he was twenty, McCormack had stood three times over the graves of the siblings closest in age to him, two brothers and a sister whose lungs could not withstand the horrors of tuberculosis. His poverty and misery were real, but the other aspects of his life as he described it were not.

McCormack's father, Joseph, a Scottish-descended Canadian, was not born in Ireland. Joe was born near Grant's Crossing in Souris, Prince Edward Island, had been married once before, and had a son, Harry, by his deceased first wife, Margaret. John McCormack's mother, Mary Ellen O'Brien, was born in Boston, not in Ireland. Mary Ellen, who was pregnant twelve times, carried only eight babies to full term. Two died in infancy, but six — Patrick, Catherine, James, John, Edward, and Donald — lived long enough to be enumerated by the census. Of these, three grown siblings, young adults seventeen, nineteen, and twenty-four years of age, predeceased their mother. Joe McCormack did not die in 1905, when John was a thirteen-year-old South Boston newsboy, but in 1929, when the thirty-seven-year-old congressman was serving his first term in the U.S. House of Representatives.

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### Unraveling the Fabrication

Tombstones tell tales. Not only do they indicate the final whereabouts of those lying beneath them, but they are intended to leave the living with a memorial to lives that have passed before them and remind them of their own mortality. Tombstones also reveal the character and history of the deceased's survivors, who pay to have the stones erected and inscribed.

Boston's most prestigious graveyards are downtown, two blocks from the crest of Beacon Hill where the majestic Bulfinch-designed State House looks down on the bustling metropolis the city has become. Part of Boston's allure and much of its curse lie within the graveyards of King's Chapel and the Old Granary where lie the city's Puritan aristocracy who brought equal helpings of enlightenment and prejudice to this unique place. In the words of John Winthrop's 1630 sermon on the *Arbella*, Boston was intended to be "a city on a hill" radiating its goodness throughout the New World and reflecting back to the Old World that a band of educated and devout worshipers could create a Christian community that would serve as a model of renewal and salvation for the benighted and decadent civilizations of Europe.<sup>33</sup>

Tombstones assisted in the reinvention of Boston's John McCormack; the unraveling of his tale begins with three tombstones found in the farther reaches of Boston. The first tombstone is located in Sandbanks, a small cemetery occupying a corner of Watertown on the Cambridge line. It is dwarfed by the adjacent Mount Auburn Cemetery, where the luminaries of Massachusetts intellectual life have been laid to rest. Close by Harvard University, Mount Auburn is the last resting place of many of the school's most illustrious scholars and famed graduates, for example, Louis Agassiz, who founded Radcliffe

College, the essayist Oliver Wendell Holmes, Supreme Court justices Joseph Story and Felix Frankfurter, U.S. senators Edward Everett and Charles Sumner, poets James Russell Lowell and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, as well as Julia Ward Howe, who wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Mount Auburn has been wonderfully landscaped with gardens, small ponds, and flowered walkways leading to the mausoleums and graves of its occupants.

Part of the landscaping included the 1920 erection of a large, thick ten-foot wall on the Cambridge-Watertown line separating the garden cemetery of Mount Auburn from Sandbanks. It was intended to provide a clear boundary between the growing burial needs of Mount Auburn and the diminishing ones of Sandbanks. The wall was built shortly after the city's bitter and ethnically divisive Boston Police Strike of 1919. Coincidence perhaps? Perhaps not.

The 1906 death certificate of James J. McCormack, the first of John McCormack's adolescent siblings to die, indicates that James was a victim of "phthisis." This was one of the many cover-up names for tuberculosis, that lung-destroying contagious disease that haunted poor immigrant families, laid waste to their vulnerable young, and forever scarred the family survivors with the mark of shame of poverty and disease.

The certificate stated that James was buried in "Mt. Auburn Cemetery (Watertown)." My call to Mount Auburn Cemetery in search of James's gravesite elicited an unmistakable response. After being told that James J. McCormack was not located in Mount Auburn Cemetery, I was asked, "Was he a Catholic?" Replying in the affirmative, I was told that his likely gravesite was in Sandbanks, which was not a part of Mount Auburn, and that I should call another number in nearby Waltham, where information about the occupants of Sandbanks could be found.

At the diocesan office in Waltham, I received a map of the graveyard, and a search of the old record book indicated that the seventeen-year-old James Joseph McCormack would be found in grave C of the fifth row in the East Range. Finding Sandbanks is not easy. Cottage Street in Watertown has no street sign, so I took the first left after crossing the city line behind Mount Auburn. The cemetery was barely visible at the end of the street. One's first visit to Sandbanks does not impress. No street sign or guidepost leads to it. No sign on the gates indicates its unique past nor do the gates fit well on their rusted hinges. It is one of Boston's oldest Irish Catholic cemeteries, and unlike that of nearby Mount Auburn, with its nonsectarian cast, its land has been consecrated.

The Sandbanks Cemetery office, which last took orders for burial in 1947, is now closed; only those for whom plots were purchased years ago have been buried there in the past half century. Maintenance has slipped. Many of the stones are askew and some are broken. A longtime maintenance man who cares for three cemeteries told me that one can sometimes feel from Sandbanks a chill that is absent elsewhere. It was he who alerted me to the presence of the ten-foot wall separating the two cemeteries. "The Protestants built that wall to keep us from them," he declaimed in a tone both softened by an Irish brogue and hardened by the realization that the two defining cultures of this city on a hill had to remain separated even in death.

Once I arrived at Sandbanks, locating James's gravesite was less difficult. The cemetery map had accurately captured its unique land configuration, and the ten-foot wall separating it from Mount Auburn was there in all its peculiar majesty. The thick concrete wall gives Mount Auburn the appearance of a fortress. It is not a simple line of demarcation.



No tombstone identified James's final location, but an unusually shaped oblong block near grave C indicated that a Julia O'Brien had erected a tombstone with two of its sides inscribed. The facing side reads

Erected by Julia O'Brien  
in memory of her son  
Patrick J. O'Brien  
b. Boston May 18, 1853  
d. Rochester, N.Y.  
October 17, 1882

The left side reads

Michael J. O'Brien  
b. Boston June 5, 1819  
d. Boston October 13, 1881

Many Sandbanks tombstones are inscribed with the birthplaces of those beneath them. Of the hundreds so recorded, most identify a parish in faraway Ireland. Tombstones identifying local parishes in the counties of Mayo and Galway in the western kingdom of Connaught, the counties of Wexford and Wicklow in the eastern kingdom of Leinster, and even parishes from the northern Irish Ulster region such as Tyrone, Armagh, and Enniskellen may be found there. But it is the southern kingdom of Munster that has most populated the cemetery with its dead. The counties of Cork and Kerry prevail among the departed Irish of Sandbanks.

Only a small handful of tombstones in Sandbanks carry American birthplaces, and one of these few was the curious oblong erected and inscribed by Julia O'Brien to memorialize her husband and son. The tombstone contained an inaccuracy, for Michael J. O'Brien was not born in Boston. According to census records, Michael O'Brien was born in Ireland, but Julia Devereux O'Brien had made her husband a Bostonian by inscribing Boston as both his place of birth and his place of death on his tombstone. Why?

Julia and Michael O'Brien were the parents of Mary Ellen O'Brien McCormack. Their names are on Mary Ellen's 1885 marriage license, both in the Boston civil records and in the register at St. James the Greater Roman Catholic Church. Michael was dead before Mary Ellen married Joe McCormack, but Julia lived to see Mary Ellen's four surviving babies, the last of whom was John William McCormack. She was the grandmother of James J. McCormack, who would remain seventeen forever. Mary Ellen's 1913 death certificate lists the names of another set of parents, Patrick O'Brien and Bridget Daley, both of Ireland. John, as Mary Ellen's oldest surviving son, would have given this information to the funeral home.

It is possible that John did not know the names of his maternal grandparents. Michael O'Brien had died before John was born, and Julia died when he was less than a year old. However, John was fourteen when James was buried in plot C5A of Sandbanks, and he stood beside the tombstone of Michael and Patrick O'Brien erected by grandmother Julia. John was well aware of how his grandmother had reinvented his grandfather as a Bostonian. John knew that this inscription had literally been chiseled in stone.

When John came to fill out his own mother's death certificate seven years later, he chose not to identify Michael and Julia O'Brien as his mother's parents but rather took



the names of two deceased South Boston neighbors, Patrick O'Brien and Bridget Daley, and entered them on his mother's death certificate. It was a dangerous move, but John and his two younger brothers, Edward and Donald, had stood silently over the graves of five siblings, four of whom were grown, two in Canada and three in Boston. Now that they had buried their mother, there was no generational barrier between them and their own mortality. The document was partially true. Mary Ellen's parents had been born in Ireland — it says so in the 1900 Census. But the names of her parents on her death certificate were untrue.

John McCormack was now only twenty-one years old, and the burden of protecting his two surviving brothers from the deadly fate that had befallen so many others in the family was uppermost in his mind. Grandma Julia understood that to be Irish in nineteenth-century Boston jeopardized the welfare of a family. McCormack understood that to be Irish in twentieth-century Boston was essential for survival.

Those who arrived in Boston from Ireland in the years before the Civil War had to confront the Yankee ascendancy in its fullest glory. Boston's industry and commerce were thriving and its literary output staggered belief. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Nathaniel Hawthorne, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Henry David Thoreau extended Boston's intellectual reach throughout North America and the entire English-speaking world. These Boston Yankees were clearly superior beings, but who were these Irish people? What were they doing here? Why had they come to this center of enlightenment?

Even that most cherished of Yankee intellectuals, Henry David Thoreau, who empathized with all God's creatures, displayed remarkable callousness and condescension to his Irish neighbors, the Fields, on Walden Pond. To Thoreau, who had often come to the spot in the woods where the Fields settled long before "the ship was built that floated this family to America," his disdain was palpable:

"An honest, hard-working, but shiftless man plainly was John Field; and his wife . . . with round greasy face and bare breast, still thinking to improve her condition one day; with the never absent mop in one hand, and yet no effects of it visible any where."<sup>34</sup>

The insensitive Thoreau described the infant child of the Fields as a "poor starveling brat" and any serious discussion with one of John Field's ancestry was doomed. "But alas! the culture of an Irishman is an enterprise to be undertaken with a moral bog hoe."<sup>35</sup>

There was no welcome in Boston for the Irish, so concealing an Irish birthplace was essential for economic survival, and both Michael and Julia O'Brien knew this well. It was the time of the NINA employment signs — No Irish Need Apply. In a jaunty doggerel rejoinder to these signs, it was often intoned as "Whoe'er writ it, writ it well, the same is writ on the gates of Hell, 'No Irish Need Apply.'"

But for fourteen-year-old John McCormack, standing over this open grave with his brothers, Patrick, Edward, and Donald, and his sister, Catherine, sadness overhung the cold February morning. On this day, Mary Ellen bade farewell to the first of her three grown children who would predecease her. No tombstone was placed there, but it was close enough to the graves of her parents, Michael and Julia O'Brien, and their son, Patrick, for whom her oldest son was named. It may have been her only consolation that day. James's father, Joseph H. McCormack, did not accompany his wife and the five remaining children to the gravesite. He had left the family apartment sometime the previous year and his whereabouts were unknown. Now they were six.

Some thought that Joe McCormack had probably returned to his native Prince Edward Island, the smallest of Canada's Maritime Provinces. Others believed that he

was in an alcoholic haze in some town along the northern route between Boston and PEI. Perhaps he was dead. Who knows? Who cares? Where he went or why he left mattered little to this hardy band of Boston Irishmen he left behind. Joe McCormack was dead to them.

John McCormack learned a number of important lessons that day, one being that Yankee Boston needed to separate itself even from dead Irishmen. Another was that altering a family history to escape poverty and gain employment was no sin. It was good enough for grandma Julia and it would be good enough for John when he, too, had to alter the details of his family history.

Three months later, in May, deadly news struck again. Catherine Amelia, the only daughter, had been diagnosed with tuberculosis. The horror returned quickly to the household. The slender, pretty blond girl, known as Kitty to the cousins, was only eighteen when the fatal diagnosis was delivered. Five months later, early in October 1906, the McCormack family reassembled to bury Catherine Amelia, her mother's greatest confidante in this family of five boys and a father given to alcohol-induced rages and absences. Now they were five.

The family was more prepared for this death than they had been for that of James. They had purchased a cemetery plot for Catherine in Mount Benedict Cemetery in West Roxbury. It was at one of the far rural ends of the city, but it was Catholic, it was new, and it was clearly a cut above Sandbanks.

John McCormack, who had left school in June at the age of fourteen, was now employed full time as a messenger boy for the Boston Curb Exchange. I doubt if he realized that his first major outlay as a full-time worker was to cover the cost of a cemetery plot for his only sister. But sometimes there are no choices. On this October morning, the four remaining siblings, Patrick, John, Edward, and Donald, gathered at their sister's grave. It was a wonderfully crisp New England fall day, but it is doubtful if any of those present took notice. Once again, Mary Ellen McCormack stood alone over her daughter's grave with no comfort from her husband, Catherine's father.

McCormack's initial full-time job led to his discovery by a Boston lawyer, William T. Way of Plymouth, who had an office in the city. By 1911, McCormack had been elevated to a clerk in Way's office and was eagerly devouring the law books on Way's shelves. But death struck once again. This time it was twenty-four year-old Patrick, his oldest brother, whose tubercular lungs would also fail. Now they were four.

Patrick was listed as a hostler, a stable hand, in the 1910 Census; his 1911 death certificate listed his occupation as clerk. What did it matter now? Once again the diminished family gathered at Mount Benedict, and Patrick, buried beside his sister, was the third of Mary Ellen McCormack's grown children to depart this life. Death had been a constant companion in the harsh forty-nine years of her life and twenty-four years of her motherhood.

Two years later Mary Ellen was next, dead of chronic nephritis exacerbated by tuberculosis. Because she did not have the coughing and wheezing symptoms most common to the disease known as consumption, it was not known that she also had succumbed to this shameful ailment. Nor did any family member make the connection between the altered household sleeping arrangements instituted following the 1905 departure of Joe McCormack and the spread of the disease. Sister Catherine had shared her mother's bed and Catherine's bed had been given to James Joseph. Mary Ellen carried the dying sixteen-year-old James Joseph from his sickbed to the toilet. In other cultures and societies, eighteen-year-old Catherine would have handled this difficult chore, but among the

Catholic Irish, native or Boston-born, any intimacy among young adults was prohibited. Brothers and sisters were not exempt from this proscription. The misinformation surrounding James Joseph's ailment led the family to believe that he did not have the dreaded and highly contagious TB bacillus. With Catherine sleeping beside her, Mary Ellen carried the fatal disease from her son to her daughter.

The three younger boys, John, Edward, and Daniel, all slept in the same bed. The time the boys spent away from the apartment in South Boston's John A. Andrew School and playing outdoors had spared them from succumbing to the contagion. Mary Ellen McCormack was not aware of any of this, and in 1913 her time had come. Thank God. It is doubtful whether she could have buried yet another child.

In 1913, John McCormack and his two remaining brothers buried their mother in Mount Benedict alongside her oldest son and only daughter. Again, Joe McCormack did not appear at the funeral. The boys knew that he was alive somewhere, but they never knew if he would return. So on their mother's 1913 death certificate, Mary Ellen McCormack's marital status is listed M for married, not W for widowed. Joe, gone for eight years, was dead to the boys if not yet to God.

Now they were three: John, twenty-one, Edward, seventeen, and Donald just fourteen, three fatherless boys who had just buried their mother. In a city with little compassion for its ethnic poor, despair might have been the expected boys' response. But John would not be denied. He was about to pass the bar examination and he would have a professional credential to make his way in Boston. But which Boston? Yankee or Irish?

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### **Making It in Massachusetts**

From those who aspired to ascend its economic and social ladders, Yankee Boston required Puritan ancestry and a Harvard degree. John McCormack knew that genealogists had long lists of Mayflower descendants and that the Harvard Alumni Association had long lists of all the college's students past and present. These lists were zealously guarded to prevent any interloper from making a false claim to advance himself inappropriately. John of course knew that since his name was not on either list, Yankee Boston was inaccessible. He would make his ascent from Andrew Square through Irish Boston.

Irish Boston's requirements were less strict than Yankee Boston's. Documentation was not necessary but it helped. Being Catholic, a given, was essential. The successful combination of life experiences for advancement within Irish Boston was being the son of an Irish immigrant and having a widowed mother with younger siblings to support. These were the family histories of the great political gatekeepers of the Boston Irish — the inscrutable Martin Lomasney of the West End, the irrepressible James Michael Curley of South Boston and Roxbury, and President John F. Kennedy's grandfathers. John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald of the North End and Patrick J. "P.J." Kennedy of East Boston.

McCormack had learned early on that talent, ability, and compassion were insufficient for political advancement in ethnically-conscious Boston. During his 1906–1913 apprenticeship in the law office of William T. Way, his Yankee benefactor, and in the three years following, McCormack had seen Way run unsuccessfully four times as a Democratic candidate from Plymouth — three times for the State House and once for the state Senate. Way, a Yankee Unitarian in an Irish Catholic party who ran as a Democrat from a Republican town, did not have the right stuff. McCormack learned graphically the importance of having it.



Did John McCormack have the right stuff for these people? The answer is a simple no. Joe McCormack was born in a Canadian Province, not in Ireland, which in South Boston made him a “two-boater” or “herring choker.” As Thomas H. O’Connor, a South Boston native and author of *The Boston Irish*, recounted to me, two-boaters were unwelcome, for jobs were scarce enough. “Rory, get the dory. There’s a herrin’ in the bay” was the anti-Maritimer refrain heard around Southie.<sup>36</sup> And — heaven forbid! — Joe McCormack may even have been a Scot!

Boss Martin Lomasney, the mahatma of ethnically diverse Ward Eight, was so sensitive about his Irish heritage that he was the only member of the 300-plus Massachusetts Constitutional Convention in 1917 to declare that he was the issue of “Irish parents.”<sup>37</sup> His rivals suggested that Martin Lomasney was a “Novey” because his father had once spent time in Nova Scotia. By the time Lomasney was eleven, in 1871, both his parents were gone; but Lomasney was so sensitive to these accusations that he carried his parents’ marriage license and his own birth certificate in his waistcoat for the next fifty years.<sup>38</sup> Lomasney’s possession of these official documents created difficulty for individuals who sought independent verification of his ancestry.<sup>39</sup>

This ethnically charged climate hung over the city when John McCormack entered into public life. He had to be very careful.

Mary Ellen McCormack was born in Boston. Although her father had been born in Ireland, she was a native-born American. And contrary to the tale, John was not the oldest sibling. Patrick, Catherine, and James were past adolescence and into adulthood when Joe McCormack departed from the household. But desperation and ambition can work wonders, and McCormack set about to recast himself in the prevailing model of Irish Boston’s successful politicians. The Irish were in the political ascendancy and it would be in his best interest for McCormack to highlight those features of his life which emphasized his Irishness and to conceal those which did not. This would be the “greening” of John McCormack.

It was a lesson he had learned from the O’Brien tombstone in Sandbanks. Family histories could be altered if survival is at issue, so McCormack altered his history. Joe McCormack, born to a Scots-descended Canadian in Prince Edward Island, was trouble. He may have been dead to his surviving sons, but there was no certainty that he was truly dead and gone. Unbeknownst to the boys, he was living in Maine and, for twenty-four years after leaving Boston, had been working as a stonecutter in the granite quarries of Waldoboro. Joe died in 1929, while John was serving his first term in the U.S. House, not, as he told others, when he was a thirteen-year-old South Boston newsboy. John reinvented his father as a native Irishman who had died in 1905.

Mary Ellen O’Brien McCormack was also recast as a native of Ireland. It is doubtful whether she would have appreciated this posthumous relocation of her birthplace, but she would have understood why it was done. Patrick, Catherine, and James were recast as having died in infancy. That Patrick had been twenty-four, Catherine nineteen, and James seventeen when they died would have to be finessed. They may have been remembered by the McCormack brothers and their cousins but they would be lost to history.

It was a painful decision, but one that he had to make. So John told the story of the three McCormack brothers fending for themselves in times of hardship. To those who asked the Speaker about the other McCormack children, he would say only that all had died in infancy and childhood.

In 1966, Donald, his youngest brother, died in Texas, leaving John the family’s last



surviving son. Brother Edward, a colorful South Boston figure known as “Knocko,” had predeceased both of them in 1963, so it was left to John, who had become Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, to deal with Donald’s remains. McCormack had them flown to Boston and driven to Mount Benedict Cemetery and ordered the following inscription on the tombstone:

In Memory of My Mother

Mary

1861–1913

Donald J.

1901–1966

McCORMACK

Mary Ellen and Donald were memorialized on that tombstone, but Patrick and Catherine, who lay beside them, are not mentioned at all. McCormack knew they were there. He had lived with Catherine for fifteen years and with Patrick for twenty. He had stood over both their graves while his mother wept at their death. But he could not acknowledge their presence, for to do so would reveal that the altered life history which made it possible for him to ascend to the heights of Irish Boston was false. How could Speaker McCormack have grown siblings when he had told people throughout his district and in Washington that they had died in infancy? How indeed?

Leaving their names off his mother’s tombstone may have been the most difficult decision of his life at the moment of his greatest success. During the previous twelve months of 1965, McCormack had presided triumphantly over the House of Representatives during the first session of the 89th Congress, the Great Society Congress. Its legislative achievements of Medicare and Medicaid came close to President Lyndon Johnson’s goal of out-Roosevelting Franklin D. Roosevelt. Even at the zenith of his political power and influence, the half century of McCormack’s false life history had to remain in place.

If it was learned that John McCormack had lied about the ages of his deceased siblings, were there possibly other misstatements? Was his mother really born in Ireland as stated on Edward’s death certificate and John’s. Or was she born in Boston, as recorded on her own death certificate and those of James, Catherine, and Patrick and on the census returns of 1900 and 1910 and on all six of the birth notices of her enumerated children?

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### **The Search for Joe McCormack**

What of Joe McCormack? Who was he? What was he like? The evidence in Canada is consistently negative. Joe was regarded among his fellow Prince Edward Island townsmen as a drunk, a rake, a small-time swindler, and an abusive husband. One story is particularly telling. Around 1901, a pregnant Mary Ellen McCormack gathered her six children and fled from Boston to the farm of Thomas and Kate McCormack Haley near Souris, PEI, to escape Joe’s alcoholic rages. .

Kate Haley was the oldest daughter of Donald McCormack and Mary McPhee McCormack, who raised Joe McCormack. Souris, on the east coast of Prince Edward Island in Kings County, is a small community of farmers and fishermen. Its soil lacks the richness of the arable land in the central county of Queens so lovingly described in

Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*. Farm families in Souris export their children as well as their produce, for there is little of agricultural abundance there. The farms are small, mostly between fifty and one hundred acres. The Haley farm was smaller than most, a fifty-acre hillside property with a one-and-a-half-story farmhouse. It was barely large enough for Kate and Tom Haley, their own daughter Mary Ellen, the young farmhand, Archie Howlett, and the sickly Harry McCormack, the only child of Joe McCormack's first marriage and half-brother to Mary Ellen McCormack's children.

The dwelling was much too small for Mary Ellen's brood. Three adults and nine children in one small house stretched the meager resources of the Haleys and Mary Ellen's presence was not wholly welcome. A further tragedy befell Mary Ellen when the child she was carrying died.

News of her infant son's death reached Father Ronald Bernard McDonald, the parish priest of Saint Mary's in Souris, but he refused to bury the baby in consecrated ground because Mary Ellen had "abandoned the family home" in Boston.<sup>40</sup> Shortly afterward, Mary Ellen, her children, and the Haleys buried the baby's body in the field behind Saint Mary's Cemetery. Harry McCormack, the baby's eighteen-year-old half brother, followed in February 1902. Unlike the baby, he was given a tombstone and consecrated ground.

Word of Joe McCormack's impending arrival on the island led to another flight. Mary Ellen again gathered the children and left Souris to return to Boston. Neither she nor John ever returned to Prince Edward Island. To an intelligent and impressionable ten-year-old like John McCormack, the inhospitality of the Canadian townsmen toward his mother and his siblings may also have contributed to his desire to conceal his Canadian heritage. Forgiveness is in short supply when family survival is at stake.

Back in Boston, in 1902, Joe resumed his paternal role in the McCormack household. There were no more children and the coldness at the dinner table can only be imagined. The household moved again as Joe's economic deficiencies continued. Then he was gone.

According to family history, Joe McCormack died in 1905. However, there is no Massachusetts death certificate or Boston obituary, funeral mass, or cemetery plot to mark his passing.

Abandonment and desertion provided a further McCormack family shame to conceal. Failing fortunes and an ailing family had finally taken their toll on Joe. Married to a practicing Catholic wife from whom divorce was impossible, Joe opted for a poor man's divorce and abandoned his family to the hardships of urban life in America. He last appeared in the *City Directory* lists in 1910, but it was not death that removed Joe from Boston.

From 1905 to 1910, Mary Ellen continued to inform the *City Directory* that Joe was still living at home. But by the 1910 Census, Joe was no longer listed among the inhabitants of 47 Vinton Street in South Boston. Mary Ellen's anger at Joe's departure and her disappointment with her Canadian in-laws led her to provide the 1910 census taker with an altered history for the father of her four remaining sons. Rather than have her boys listed as having a Canadian father, they were given a paternal ancestry matching her own. The country from whence the father of the boys was listed was "Ire. English." Joe had become an English-speaking Irishman. Canada was vanishing from the family history.

One afternoon in 1905, Joe McCormack hopped the Boston & Maine Railroad and went north to gain employment as a stonecutter along the Atlantic's edge, which served

as the major corridor between Prince Edward Island and the city of Boston.

Joe did not totally disappear. One of the surviving Walsh cousins noted his reappearance in family correspondence. The most vivid recollection appears in a 1982 letter from Charlotte Walsh Hannaway to Edward McCormack, Jr., John McCormack's nephew and Knocko's son. Charlotte was the oldest daughter of Joe's favorite niece, Amy Keller Walsh, and her husband Chauncey Walsh, a plasterer. She was also the granddaughter of Sarah McCormack Keller, the younger of the two sisters whose family had raised Joe McCormack in Souris.

Young Charlotte Walsh observed Joe's visit to the family apartment with great fascination. As she wrote in a condolence letter to Ed McCormack in 1982,

Years ago your Grandfather came to Fields Corner and stayed with us saying he was going to see Jack in the morning to see if he could put him someplace. He had come from Maine where he had stayed for years. What a tragedy it was. What a handsome Man he was I couldn't take my eyes from him. So my Dad said "Joe, you can't go in to see Jack looking like that. Wear my suit" and so he did and the next morning he left in pa's suit. when he didn't come home or rather back to the house Ma called Jack and Jack said he had given him five dollars and he left. Jack said he would think of something for his Father but Joe went back to Maine.<sup>41</sup>

Joe McCormack returned to Waldoboro in Lincoln County, Maine, his final destination. Located along the old Boston & Maine Railroad line, \$2.50 away from Boston, Waldoboro is a small mining town arching along high-pitched hills with a few narrow streets. It is a worker's town and a Protestant town. Occasional efforts to organize a parish among the town's few Catholics had failed, and priests from nearby towns were called in to officiate at religious functions, but it was home to Joe McCormack. Waldoboro was close to the appropriately named city of Rockland, and its surrounding environs included the limestone quarries in Thomaston. Stoneworkers, many of whom were Canadian Scotsmen and Irishmen from Prince Edward Island, assembled in these towns along the Lincoln and Knox county borders.

Joe worked in the granite quarries along Route 1 and boarded with George and Viva Noyes. Viva would have driven Joe the fifteen miles to Rockland's Knox County Hospital on February 5, 1929, for treatment of his worsening bronchitis. Joe died of bronchial pneumonia the following day.<sup>42</sup> Cracking rocks filled stonecutters' lungs with dust, ironically the industrial equivalent of the dreaded tuberculosis that years earlier shortened the lives of so many of Joe's children.

A fellow worker of Joe's came down from Waldoboro on the Boston & Maine to tell John McCormack the news of his father's passing, but McCormack was not there. A member of the U.S. House of Representatives, he was on the floor during that week in February. His Boston secretary relayed the news to him in Washington, but the prospect of returning to New England to bury a man he despised was an unpleasant task McCormack chose to avoid.

Joe McCormack's body had been removed from the hospital by Harold W. Flanders, Waldoboro's busiest undertaker, who received John McCormack's instructions. How McCormack characterized his feelings toward his father and what he instructed Flanders to do, although they are not known may easily be imagined. What is known is contained in the obituary published in the weekly *Lincoln County News* of February 14, 1929, which was that Joseph McCormack, late of Waldoboro, Maine, for the past twenty-five years, a native of Prince Edward Island, Canada, born in 1862, and a stonecutter, was laid to rest in the Waldoboro Rural Cemetery. His burial in a pauper's grave in the



unmarked town portion of the cemetery was omitted from the account.

Expectations of a Mass, a wake, and consecrated ground, the marks of a “decent burial” to Roman Catholics, appear to have been unrealized. None of the three Roman Catholic parishes in the area — Saint Bernard’s in Rockland, Saint Denis’s in North Whitefield, and the venerable Saint Patrick’s in Newcastle — provided a priest for the burial of Joe McCormack, the family deserter. He was interred out of the Flanders Funeral Home on a Saturday afternoon — perhaps in Chauncey Walsh’s unreturned suit — in a service conducted by the Reverend Henry O. Megert of the Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>43</sup> Joe McCormack was not buried as a Catholic, but his gravesite was not one which John ever intended to visit. Harold Flanders, a non-Catholic, knew that and acted accordingly. John McCormack may never have known that his father was buried as a pauper, but he certainly knew that he was not buried as a Catholic. Joe McCormack was a person whose remains would never be placed in Boston’s Mount Benedict Cemetery close to those of John’s beloved mother, Mary Ellen, and his siblings buried beside her. So why trouble oneself over it?

McCormack failed to give his father a decent burial. Anger and bitterness prevented his following the commandment “Honor thy father.” He had failed to memorialize his brother and sister on the tombstone of the grave they shared with his mother. These were sins. He had knowingly and deliberately dealt improperly with his family’s dead.

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### **Atonement and Achievement**

Was anyone else aware of John McCormack’s reinvention and how he had to deal with his family’s dead to bring it about? Did he confess his family sins? We cannot know the answers to these questions for certain. But it is revealing to note that the two most common correspondents in McCormack’s papers at Boston University are J. Edgar Hoover, the longtime director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Richard Cardinal Cushing, the archbishop of Boston. Hoover needed to know everything, and once McCormack became first in the line of succession to President Johnson, any hint that McCormack was a Canadian, not a native-born American, would have rendered him ineligible to assume the presidency. Hoover knew.

And Cushing knew. Like McCormack, Cardinal Cushing had come up the hard way from the tough streets of South Boston. Like McCormack, Cushing’s educational attainments had been less than those of his peers. The two men understood each other. McCormack was a man of extraordinary rectitude, and the guilt and remorse of these family events must have troubled him greatly. So he and his confessor may have revisited this subject often when guilt and shame overtook McCormack and absolution was essential to help him deal with the immense government tasks that confronted him.

Did he live an exemplary life? Yes. No more devoted husband has ever sat in the House of Representatives. McCormack’s devotion to Harriet, his wife of fifty-one years, was not only legendary but true. In June 1968, during the forty-eighth year of their marriage, John wrote a simple note to his Harriet, who was then eighty-four years old and whose health, never very robust, was failing. He wrote this heartfelt message on his stationery from the Speaker’s rooms.

Darling Harriet:

My love for you is deep and intense. With your love, God has blessed me during our married life.

I again repeat my unlimited love for you.

Your Sweetheart,  
John<sup>44</sup>

McCormack would return to their two-room corner suite on the eighth floor of the Hotel Washington that very night, as he had every night of their years together, to dine with Harriet. He did not abandon the women of his life. He was not like his father, Joe, who had abandoned two entire families. John McCormack would not be apart from his Harriet on any day of their lives together. On his last day as Speaker, observers noted that the House galleries were filled not with the usual congressional staffers and Capitol Hill reporters but with the wives of the members themselves, who were there to honor the House's greatest husband.<sup>45</sup>

Did McCormack atone for his sins of dishonoring the dead? Whether he did so to his own satisfaction remained locked within his heart, but there is little question that he certainly made the effort.

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### Complementary Identities

To his South Boston and Dorchester constituents, John McCormack was Irish, but not as Irish as many might have liked him to be. McCormack's efforts in the 1930s to fight anti-Semitism and his postwar support of the new state of Israel led some of the more hard-core Boston Irishmen to label him Rabbi John. These were most likely the remnants of Father Charles Edwin Coughlin's Social Justice movement, which thrived for a short time among Boston's poorest and least enlightened Irish Catholic residents. Later some of them would rally to the cause of Father Leonard Feeney, whose anti-Jewish and anti-Protestant diatribes regularly filled Boston Common with followers and detractors.

To such South Boston natives as historian Thomas O'Connor, John McCormack "looked like a herrin'" — a Maritimer.<sup>46</sup> Tall and gaunt, he dressed like an undertaker with his dark suits and white shirts. Never during his speakership, and not even during his retirement, did McCormack relinquish the formality of his dress.

The *Irish Echo*'s anniversary article on McCormack's death contrasted him with some other giants of the Boston Irish. "John McCormack isn't as colorful a celt as was Richard Cardinal Cushing. Nor does he have the shamrock style of the legendary James Michael Curley or the celtic charisma of our much loved and missed President John Fitzgerald Kennedy."<sup>47</sup> Given the Scottishness of his roots, McCormack would have been hard pressed to generate a shamrock style, never mind colorfulness and charisma. Such traits are seldom associated with the Scots.

It was John's brother, Edward J. McCormack, Sr., "Knocko," who was perceived as the real thing in South Boston. Knocko's loud, boisterous, and raucous ways were the stuff of local legend. Knocko, who stood a little under six foot but weighed close to three hundred pounds, was a human locomotive whose quick temper and powerful fists had earned him his nickname. He was a bootlegger during Prohibition and a tavern keeper afterward. Knocko was for many years the grand marshal of the annual Saint Patrick's Day parade in South Boston, which is akin to being declared

emperor. Knocko was a quintessential Irish “boyo.” In the words of former Massachusetts Senate president William M. Bulger, Knocko was “as self-effacing as a bass drum.”<sup>48</sup>

Knocko generally referred to his brother as the Congy. To those like Bill Bulger and Tip O’Neill, who knew them both, John was Knocko’s complete opposite. But Knocko provided John with the Irish ethnic cover he needed to maintain the support of his South Boston and Dorchester constituents.

Knocko McCormack was a clear embodiment of Carl Wittke’s characterization of the Irish as a “warm-blooded and warm-hearted people . . . convivial and generous, sometimes to a fault, frequently improvident, [who] do not often come in conflict with the law except for intemperance, minor offenses, and occasional difficulties arising from the political graft of some of our larger cities.”<sup>49</sup>

This characterization does not fit John McCormack, who was better described in this depiction of Wittke regarding the Scotch-Irish: “The Scotch-Irishman’s tenacity, firmness, and determination, his courage and his self-reliance, have helped him to make a notable record in political leadership.”<sup>50</sup> Wit, humor, and charm seem to be absent here. His protégé Tip O’Neill repeated the line “John McCormack was so conservative that he didn’t burn the candle at one end.”<sup>51</sup>

McCormack told me in 1977 what he learned early, that in the House, “it was the southerners who had the power and you had to be friendly with the southerners if you wanted to succeed.”<sup>52</sup> But among the southerners, there was an important regional element in his choice of best friends and political allies. Those with whom he was closest were from eastern Tennessee and eastern Kentucky, western North Carolina, north Georgia, and north Alabama. These locales, situated in the southern end of the Appalachian Mountains, were in the regional heart of the Scotch-Irish. Those curious hyphenated souls were the descendants of predominantly Presbyterian Scottish Lowlanders who first relocated to the Ulster Plantation in northern Ireland and then moved westward across the Atlantic. They preceded by a century the arrival of the Catholic Irish on this continent.<sup>53</sup>

The southern Appalachian congressmen, both those born in and those representing that part of the nation, included a number of McCormack’s closest friends — Fred Vinson of Kentucky, Jere Cooper of Tennessee, Gene Cox of Georgia, Will Bankhead of north Alabama, and Alfred Bulwinkle of western North Carolina. Speaker Sam Rayburn of Texas was McCormack’s greatest partner in shaping the legislative destiny of the House, and like McCormack, he shared his ethnic origins. Rayburn’s ancestors had originally come to Pennsylvania from the Ulster Plantation in northern Ireland during the 1700s migration of the Scotch-Irish to America.<sup>54</sup> Moving first to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, the Rayburn family continued westward into east Tennessee. Sam Rayburn was born there in Roane County, then a stronghold of the American Scotch-Irish in the southern Appalachian chain.

There was something about John McCormack that Rayburn and his fellow Scotch-Irishmen liked. Perhaps it was his Scotch-Irish tenacity, firmness, and determination. But McCormack could not tell them what it was they liked, for if it had been learned in South Boston that John McCormack was more Scotch-Irish and Canadian than immigrant Irish, his career in the House would have come to an abrupt and painful end.

Consequently, McCormack concealed his true ethnic identity. His reinvented Irish identity helped him hold his South Boston seat, and his genuine Scotch-Irish behavioral style gained him friends and legislative allies in a chamber dominated by these men of the mountains of the Southeast. Both of McCormack’s identities paid political divi-




dends.

In his fifth term, Congressman John McCormack served as a senior member of the House Ways and Means Committee when it wrote the Social Security Act of 1935. This extraordinary bill instituted a national system of social insurance, including old age pensions. It established a cooperative federal-state system of unemployment compensation and a tax for old-age and survivors' insurance to be levied on employers and employees. It authorized grants to the states to help them meet the cost of old-age pensions allowed under state law and authorized grants to the states to assist in relief of the destitute, blind, homeless, dependent and delinquent children, and in services such as public health, vocational rehabilitation, and maternity and infant care.<sup>55</sup>

Three decades later, as the Speaker of the 89th Congress (1965–1967), John McCormack presided over the House when Social Security legislation was greatly augmented by President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society acts creating Medicare and Medicaid, which changed dramatically the relation between the economic needs of Americans and the willingness of their government to address those needs. Once again, Boston's McCormack would play a key role in this transforming legislative era.

Never again would the full weight of poverty grind American citizens down while the federal government in Washington remained indifferent to their demands. Had this legislation existed a generation earlier, the McCormack children would not have suffered their afflictions nor been sped to their graves. Never again would an adult child have to deal agonizingly with the economic plight of an indigent parent as McCormack was forced to do with his father on one very painful Boston morning.

The legislation that John McCormack expedited through the Congress altered American social policy forever, and if it took a counterfeit personal history to place him in a post where he could make it happen, a far greater good had been done. Mary Ellen McCormack's "good boy" gave her, and all heroic mothers like her, a living monument. And that is no blarney! 

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## Notes

1. Michael R. Beschloss, ed., *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963–1964* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), photo pages, 224 ff.
2. Birch Bayh, *One Heartbeat Away: Presidential Disability and Succession* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1968).
3. The most critical accounts of the McCormack speakership appeared in two books by Democratic Congressman Richard Walker Bolling of Missouri, *House Out of Order* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1965), and *Power in the House: A History of the Leadership of the House of Representatives* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), 230–238. Bolling, a protégé of Sam Rayburn, felt that McCormack had surrendered power to the conservative committee chairs.
4. Telephone interview with Dr. Martin Sweig, Winthrop, Massachusetts, June 1998.
5. Biographies and memoirs of the Austin-Boston Speakers: re Sam Rayburn, see C. Dwight Dorrough, *Mr. Sam* (New York: Random House, 1962); Edward Allen, *Sam Rayburn: Leading the Lawmakers* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Press, 1963); Booth Mooney, *Roosevelt and Rayburn: A Political Partnership* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1971); Alfred Steinberg, *Sam Rayburn: A Biography* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1975); Anthony Champagne, *Congressman Sam Rayburn* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1984); D. B. Hardeman and Donald C. Bacon, *Rayburn: A Biography* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987); re Joseph William Martin, see his autobiography, *My First Fifty Years in Politics*, as told to Robert J. Donovan (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960); re Carl

Albert, see his autobiography with Danney Goble, *Little Giant: The Life and Times of Speaker Carl Albert* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990); re Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, Jr., see Paul Clancy and Shirley Elder, *Tip: A Biography of Thomas P. O'Neill, Speaker of the House* (New York: Macmillan, 1980); his best-selling memoir with William Novak, *Man of the House: The Life and Political Memoirs of Speaker Tip O'Neill* (New York: Random House, 1987); and with Gary Hymel, *All Politics Is Local and Other Rules of the Game* (New York: Times Books, 1994); re Jim Wright, see John Barry, *The Ambition and the Power: The Fall of Jim Wright* (New York: Viking, 1989), and his own memoirs, *Worth It All: My War for Peace* (New York: Brassey's, 1993), and *Balance of Power: Presidents and Congress from the Era of McCarthy to the Age of Gingrich* (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1996).

6. A typical article about John McCormack in the Horatio Alger genre is Richard W. O'Connor, "From Andrew Square to the Speaker's Chair," *Yankee Magazine*, April 1976. McCormack loved the Horatio Alger stories and his nickname in South Boston was "Little Dick" because he regularly reread such Alger classics as *Ragged Dick*. His one-time residence at 470 Dorchester Street met Alger Street at the curb, which was named for Boston's own Horatio Alger.
7. Interview with Speaker John W. McCormack, Washington, D.C., September, 1968.
8. Among the relevant accounts are Sander Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States, 1924–1941* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974); Walter Goodman, *The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968); and Earl Latham, *The Communist Conspiracy in Washington from the New Deal to McCarthy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966).
9. Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn*, 212.
10. The Alien Registration Act was approved on June 28, 1940 (54 U.S. Statutes 670–676). McCormack's role was described in my May 1997 interview, Winchester, Massachusetts, with Dr. Martin Sweig.
11. Telephone interview with former Speaker John W. McCormack, Boston, March 1977.
12. Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., a future secretary of state, describes McCormack's role in *Lend-Lease, Weapon for Victory* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 68, 70. McCormack's Irish-American connection is made in Leon Martel, *Lend-Lease, Loans, and the Coming of the Cold War: A Study of the Implementation of Foreign Policy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1979), 216–217. McCormack's role in deflecting Irish-American opposition to legislation aiding Britain may be found in T. Ryle Dwyer, *Irish Neutrality and the USA: 1939–1947* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977). According to Ryle, page 39,

A representative from Missouri expressed surprise that McCormack should support the bill. "I never knew I would live to see the day that a good Irishman like John McCormack from Massachusetts would openly admit that Great Britain is our first line of defense."

McCormack responded [the] next day, thanking the Congressman for paying him a great compliment by characterising him as an Irishman. "There is," McCormack added, "one greater compliment that he could give me — by characterising me as 'The American of Irish descent from Boston!'"

13. See Martin, *My First Fifty Years in Politics*, 100–101, and Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1947), 614.
14. Robert H. Ferrell, *Choosing Truman: The Democratic Convention of 1944* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994). McCormack is not mentioned in this volume, even though he chaired the Resolutions Committee, which wrote the platform. See "McCormack Asks Collaboration," *New York Times*, July 10, 1944, 16; James A. Hagerty, "Wallace Backers in Chicago Gloomy . . . Brief Platform Sought — McCormack and Mrs. Norton Put It at 500 to 1,000 Words — Foreign Policy Stressed," *New York Times*, July 15, 1944, 26; and "Foreign-Policy Day Set by Democrats — McCormack Says the Platform Makers Will Devote All of Wednesday to This Issue," *New York Times*, July 17, 1944, 8.
15. Robert Donovan's version of that fateful afternoon has only Lewis Deschler, the House parliamentarian, and James M. Barnes, a White House legislative liaison, in the room with Truman and Rayburn. Others were expected at the close of House business. See

- Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945–1948* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 3–5. See also President Truman's own recollection in Volume I of his memoirs, *Year of Decisions* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), 4, and David M. McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 4, 7, for the swearing-in.
16. James Michael Curley noted John Kennedy as "the glaring exception," in his autobiography, *I'd Do It Again: A Record of All My Uproarious Years* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1957), 333–334. Jack Beatty, in *The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley, 1884–1958* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1992), 480, contends that the decision not to sign the petition was JFK's own and countered his father's wishes. JFK wished to avenge Curley's attacks on his mother's father, John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald. President Truman gave John McCormack the credit for the Curley pardon. The president said, "I did it for you, John," 481.
  17. Joe Kennedy's anti-Semitism was long suspected. See "The Jewish Question," in Ronald Kessler, *The Sins of the Father: Joseph P. Kennedy and the Dynasty He Founded* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), 161–176. It is also noted in Nigel Hamilton's highly critical *JFK: Reckless Youth* (New York: Random House, 1992), 108, 247, 512, 669. John McCormack's assistance to John Kennedy with Jewish voters is recounted in McCormack's interview with T. Harrison Baker of the University of Texas Oral History Project, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, September 23, 1968, 21–22.
  18. The House Select Committee on Astronautics and Space Exploration was created on March 5, 1958, by H.Res. 496 of the 85th Congress, with House Majority Leader John W. McCormack as chair.
  19. Given the fact that this selection led to two important presidencies, this decision has been analyzed countless times. The narrow success of the Kennedy-Johnson ticket has led many to take credit for putting it together. Even though Kennedy named him as his convention floor manager, McCormack is most often left out of accounts that focus on decision making within the Kennedy camp. See Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 50–57; Jules Witcover, *Crapshoot: Rolling the Dice on the Vice Presidency* (New York: Crown, 1992), 140–163; and Jeff Shesol, "The Affront," in *Mutual Contempt: Lyndon Johnson, Robert Kennedy, and the Feud That Defined a Decade* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 41–60. McCormack's role, if acknowledged, was presumably to convince his good friend Sam Rayburn, Johnson's floor manager, that Kennedy was offering the vice presidency to Lyndon Johnson in good faith, not as an empty gesture with the assumption that the offer would be rejected. See McCormack's interview with Baker, 13–17. See also Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 574–582.
  20. See McCormack interview with Baker, 24–25.
  21. The fullest account of this conflict appears in Murray B. Levin, *Kennedy Campaigning: The System and the Style as Practiced by Senator Edward Kennedy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966). The Teddy-Eddie debates and their aftermath are covered in chap. 4, 181–232.
  22. Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President, 1964* (New York: Atheneum, 1965), covered the convention in chap. 9, "Lyndon Johnson's Convention," 243–293.
  23. See *Congressional Quarterly*, "Congress, 1965 — The Year In Review: Johnson Leadership, Large Majorities Win Legislative Grand Slam for Democrats," *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 1965, XXI (Washington, D.C., 1966), 65–79, and "Congress Backs Johnson on 93% of Roll Call Votes," 1099–1110. The success rate for Johnson in the House was 94 percent (105 successes on 112 votes).
  24. Accounts of this event may be found in P. Allan Dionisopoulos, *Rebellion, Racism and Representation* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1970), 1–18, and Charles V. Hamilton, *Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.: The Political Biography of an American Dilemma* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), 445–478.
  25. *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 1969, XXV (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1970), 25.



26. This argument gets fuller treatment in Garrison Nelson, "Congressional Race Politics and the End of the Austin-Boston Connection," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the New England Political Science Association in Portland, Maine, April 1990.
27. May 1997 telephone interview with Sweig.
28. See Richard C. Bain and Judith H. Parris, *Convention Decisions and Voting Records*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1973), 20–23.
29. All the biographical accounts of John McCormack's early life contain this version. See "John William McCormack," in *The Speakers of the U.S. House of Representatives: A Bibliography*, ed. Donald R. Kennon (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 266; Charles Moritz, ed., "John W. McCormack," *Current Biography*, 1962 (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1963), 275–277; Richard H. Gentile, "John William McCormack," *Dictionary of American Biography*, Supplement Ten, 1975–1980 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995), 483–487. Mea culpa! Even I accepted the story in my profile of John McCormack in *The Encyclopedia of the United States Congress*, edited by Donald C. Bacon, Roger H. Davidson, and Morton H. Keller (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), vol. 3, 1328–1330.
30. Transcribed interview with John W. McCormack conducted by Edward Kraft, May 18, 1971. The family history quotation appears on pages 2–3. These papers, hereinafter referred to as McCormack Family Papers, were provided to me by the Speaker's late nephew, the Hon. Edward J. McCormack, Jr., in March 1997. A more public recounting of the tale appears in a reminiscing article, John McCormack, "I Remember When I Was Thirteen," in Leo P. Danwer, *I Remember Southie* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1976), 119–121. This short article was located by Paul Wright of the University of Massachusetts Boston.
31. The indispensable book on Boston Irish politics is Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995).
32. Books about Curley include Beatty, *The Rascal King*; Joseph Dinneen, *The Purple Shamrock: The Hon. James M. Curley of Boston* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1949); and Curley's autobiography, *I'd Do It Again*. Curley's best-known appearance is as the model for Mayor Frank Skeffington in Edwin O'Connor, *The Last Hurrah* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1956). Books about John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald include John Henry Cutler, *"Honey Fitz": Three Steps to the White House* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962); and Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Kennedys and the Fitzgeralds* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987). Books about Martin Lomasney include Leslie G. Ainley, *Boston Mahatma* (Boston: Brice Humphries, 1949), and a fictionalized account in Joseph Dinneen's 1938 novel, *Ward Eight* (New York: Arno Press reprint, 1976).
33. The full quotation is "For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and byword through the world." John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," a sermon delivered on board the *Arbella*, 1630, in Emily Morison Beck, ed., *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), 264.
34. Henry David Thoreau, *The Variorum Walden*, annotated by Walter Harding (New York: Twayne, 1962), 173. I thank Andrew McLean for bringing this quotation to my attention.
35. *Ibid.*, 174. The "brat" quote appears on page 173. Later efforts to explain Thoreau's anti-Irish prejudice were undertaken in Frank Buckley, "Thoreau and the Irish," *New England Quarterly* 13 (1940): 389–400.
36. This version of the refrain was provided to me by three Maritime-descended Bostonians. The implication was that Maritimers would chase herring in their small boats, pull them in with their bare hands, and choke them.
37. Lomasney's entry: "5th Suffolk, Boston, born there of Irish parents, Dec. 3, 1859," *A Souvenir of the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention; Boston, 1917–18–19* (Stoughton, Mass.: A. M. Bridgman, 1919), 78. At the convention Lomasney served on the Bill of Rights committee while twenty-six-year-old John McCormack served on the Form and Phraseology committee, 81.
38. According to Leslie Ainley, Lomasney's biographer, "It was a favorite trick of some of his

political antagonists to charge to the Irish electorate that Lomasney was a 'Nowey,' a native of Nova Scotia. In those days of strong racial feelings, this was calculated to be injurious to one seeking Irish support," *Boston Mahatma*, 20. Martin had "documentary evidence" to refute these charges. His parents' marriage license, his own birth certificate and baptismal record "were records that the scandalmongers who voiced the 'Nowey' charge could not overcome," *Boston Mahatma*, 21.

39. Tulane University political scientist Harold Zink states that "Mr. Lomasney claims Boston as [his] native city in spite of persistent rumors to the effect that Nova Scotia deserves that honor. The doubt as to his birthplace arises from the absence of record in parish or public archives of Boston. However, Mr. Lomasney has never taken out naturalization papers, has repeatedly insisted that he was born in Boston down on South Margin Street, and states that he has a birth certificate and a baptismal record bearing out his claim." "Czar" Martin Lomasney," in *City Bosses in the United States: A Study of Twenty Municipal Bosses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1930), 69.
40. Correspondence from a Prince Edward Island individual familiar with the McCormack family history in Canada, May 28, 1998. A century later, this is still a sore point in Souris.
41. Letter from Charlotte Walsh Hannaway, Plymouth, Massachusetts, to Edward J. McCormack, postmarked February 23, 1982, in the McCormack Family Papers.
42. Death certificate of Joseph McCormick (*sic*), Knox County, Maine, received February 7, 1929, and burial certificate, Town of Waldoboro, Lincoln County, Maine dated February 9, 1929.
43. *Lincoln County News* accounts: February 7, 1929, "Joseph McCormack was taken to Knox hospital for treatment Tuesday," 7; February 14, 1929, "Joseph E. McCormack passed away, Wednesday, Feb. 8, at Knox hospital, Rockland, of pneumonia. He was born at Prince Edward Island 66 years ago. He was a paving cutter by trade and came to this place at the beginning of the stone-cutting industry 25 years ago, making his home with Mr. and Mrs. George W. Noyes. He is survived by one brother. Funeral services were held from Flanders' funeral parlors Saturday afternoon with the Rev. H. O. Magert, pastor of the Methodist Church officiating. Burial was in rural cemetery," 7. I thank Ms. Libby Lorusso for tracking this down.
44. Letter from Speaker John W. McCormack to Harriet McCormack, June 1968, in the McCormack Family Papers.
45. Telephone interview with William McSweeney, Washington, D.C., October 1996. McSweeney and his wife, Dorothy, were regular dinner guests of the Speaker and Mrs. McCormack in the 1960s. McSweeney, an executive at Occidental Petroleum, worked with the Speaker in 1970, his last full year in office after the departure of his scandal-ridden associates, Dr. Martin Swaig and Nathan Veloshen. Dorothy McSweeney worked on oral histories with the Speaker.
46. Telephone interview with Thomas H. O'Connor, July 1998.
47. Maureen Connell, "Remembrances of those who died on November 22, especially John W. McCormack," *Boston Irish Echo*, November 21, 1981, 10.
48. William M. Bulger, *While the Music Lasts: My Life in Politics* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 14-16. The quotation appears on page 14. See also Tip O'Neill's depiction of Knocko in *Man of the House*, 121-122.
49. Carl Wittke, *We Who Built America: The Saga of the Immigrant* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University, 1967), 173. The book was originally published in 1939.
50. *Ibid.*, 63.
51. O'Neill with Novak, *Man of the House*, 121, and Wittke, *We Who Built America*, 178.
52. Telephone interview with former Speaker John McCormack, March 1977. William V. Shannon makes just this point about McCormack's House career in *The American Irish* (New York: Macmillan, 1983), 341-342. Shannon also indicated that McCormack, who spent most of his weekends in Washington, seldom returned to Boston.
53. Books about the Scotch-Irish in America include Henry James Ford, *The Scotch-Irish in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1915), republished in 1966 by Anchor Books, Hampden, Connecticut; James G. Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History*

- (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962); and Carlton Jackson, *A Social History of the Scotch-Irish* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1993).
54. Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn*, 12. A wonderful account of the Scotch-Irish migration and its impact on America may be found in "Borderlands to the Backcountry: The Flight from North Britain, 1717–1775," in David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 605–782.
55. On the 1935 act, see "The Social Security Act, 1935," in Bernard B. Schwartz and Robert B. Stevens, eds., *Income Security*, vol. 3 of *Statutory History of the United States* (New York: Chelsea House, 1970), 59–167. McCormack is mentioned primarily for his role in passing the Social Security Amendments of 1939, 235–236.



# Family Values and Presidential Elections

# The Use and Abuse of the Family and Medical Leave Act in the 1992 and 1996 Campaigns

Steven K. Wisensale, Ph.D.

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*This article explores how and why the debate on family leave policy became intertwined with the discussion of family values during the 1992 and 1996 presidential campaigns. It covers the emergence of family values in political debates in general and in election-year strategies in particular, the developmental history of family leave policy, including important benchmarks that occurred at both the state and federal levels. It also considers the role played by family values and family leave during the 1992 election and how the family leave bill and at least two other legislative proposals became important components of the discussions about family values during the 1996 presidential campaign, particularly the Democrats' use of "family leave day" on September 24.*

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Although the first family leave bill in the nation's history was introduced in 1985 by Patricia Schroeder, Democrat of Colorado, in the House and Christopher J. Dodd, Democrat of Connecticut, in the Senate, the debates that followed failed to produce any legislation. Both President Ronald Reagan and Vice President George Bush staunchly opposed the enactment of such a measure. Meanwhile a more intense debate occurred in state legislatures, where, over an eight-year period in which the original proposal was stalled in Washington, almost thirty states and the District of Columbia adopted some form of family leave legislation.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike Reagan, who never saw a family leave bill cross his desk, President Bush vetoed the proposal twice, in 1990 and again in 1992. Each time Congress failed to muster enough votes to override his veto. Prior to his second veto, however, Bush submitted to Congress a counterproposal that replaced government mandates with tax incentives for businesses willing to provide family leave to their employees. Rejected by the Democratic majority Congress, Bush responded by vetoing the opposition party's bill in late September, just four months after Vice President Dan Quayle's attack on Murphy Brown, a month after the Republican nominating convention emphasized family values, and six weeks before the presidential election that ended his term in the White House. Then, on February 5, 1993, just three weeks after being sworn in, President Bill Clinton signed the Family and Medical Leave Act, the very first bill passed by his administration.

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I explore how and why the debate over family leave policy became intertwined with the discussion of family values during the 1992 and 1996 presidential campaigns, namely, the emergence of family values in political debates in general and in election-year strategies in particular, the developmental history of family leave policy, including important benchmarks that occurred at both the state and federal levels, the role played by family values and family leave during the 1992 election, and how the family leave bill and at least two other legislative proposals became important components of the discussions about family values during the 1996 presidential campaign, particularly the Democrats' use of "family leave day" on September 24.

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### **The Emergence of Family Values in Political Debates and Election-Year Strategies**

The focus on family values in political discussions is a relatively new phenomenon. Despite the fact that William Safire has produced multiple editions of his *Dictionary of American Politics*, the term "family values" does not appear in his work until the 1995 edition, indicating the relatively recent political use of the term. According to Safire, the words were included in the 1976 Republican platform. "Divorce rates, threatened neighborhoods and schools and public scandal all create a hostile atmosphere that erodes family structures and family values."<sup>2</sup> Eight years later New York governor Mario Cuomo referred to family and values separately in his 1984 speech before the Democratic National Convention.

In 1992, however, "family values" served as one of the GOP's attack dogs in the presidential campaign. Dan Quayle launched a verbal assault against the TV sitcom *Murphy Brown*, and an entire evening of the Republican National Convention was devoted to "family values night," during which presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan delivered a prime-time speech that warned the nation about a coming "culture war." Meanwhile, the Christian Coalition, under the leadership of TV evangelist Pat Robertson, who ran for the presidency as a Republican in 1988, attacked the Clintons in particular. "When Bill and Hillary Clinton talk about family values," stated Robertson, "they are not talking about either families or values. They are talking about a radical plan to destroy the traditional family and transfer its functions to the federal government."<sup>3</sup>

The implication in the Republicans' use of the term for political purposes was that the Democrats had assumed a permissive attitude toward moral standards in general and abortion, single parenthood, and homosexual rights in particular, thus undermining the institution of the family. But with both political parties attempting to capture what Gilbert Steiner refers to as the "higher moral ground" in the debate over the family, the Democrats fired back in 1992, accusing the Republicans of using the term as a code phrase for intolerance and discrimination.<sup>4</sup> Further, it was a Democratic Congress that passed its version of the family leave bill in the middle of the 1992 campaign, prompting candidate Clinton to conclude that "Republicans talk about family values while Democrats value families."<sup>5</sup> Consequently, by Election Day the Republicans had adopted a new term, "traditional values," in their attempt to capture the higher moral ground.

The focus on family values did not end in 1992. With the Republicans winning both houses of Congress for the first time in more than forty years, the debate over

family values was very much a part of the 1994 off-year election. Of the ten proposals included in the Republicans' Contract with America, for example, at least four were aimed specifically at families. Two years later, in Clinton's quest for a second term, it was the Democrats who made Families First their campaign slogan. Voters were reminded that the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 was the first bill ever signed by President Clinton, that George Bush had vetoed it twice, and that Clinton's 1996 opponent, Bob Dole, led the vote against the bill's passage in 1990 and 1992 while serving as majority leader of the Senate.

Despite the verbal sparring over family values during the last two presidential campaigns, only a handful of family-oriented bills were ever adopted and signed into law. While both Democrats and Republicans hold dear their respective concepts of family values, the two parties approach family policy from different angles. The Democrats have been inclined to create or fund costly programs designed to meet basic social needs. Republicans, on the other hand, have focused on strengthening the so-called moral fabric through restricting access to abortions, regulating the content of TV, films, and music aimed at children, and by "getting tough" on "undeserving" welfare recipients. As a result, we find ourselves staring at a split screen. On one side is the volatile and emotional public debate on family values that appears to surface whenever it is politically profitable for one party or the other. Juxtaposed with this image is the stark reality of legislative gridlock on family policy initiatives or what Steiner refers to as "the futility of family policy."<sup>6</sup> Between 1985 and 1993, however, the split screen merged into one when the discussion of family values and family policy converged at the very heart of the family leave debate.

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### **The Developmental History of Family Leave Policy**

The debate about family leave policy began at the state, not the federal, level. Why it transpired in this particular order can best be explained by first referring to the growing interest in family policy that was spawned during the Jimmy Carter administration and inherited by the Reagan and Bush administrations.

Two events initiated during the Carter years are particularly significant with respect to family policy in general and family leave in particular. The first was during his 1976 campaign for the presidency when Carter issued his Nine Point Plan for the Family, a collection of campaign promises that ranged from welfare reform to stricter child support laws to federally funded child care programs.<sup>7</sup> In the second, near the end of his term, Carter convened the first and only White House Conference on Families, considered by many to be a major benchmark in the developmental history of American family policy.<sup>8</sup>

The significance of these two milestones should not be overlooked. An onslaught of books and articles on family policy began almost immediately after the closing session of the 1980 White House Conference and has continued at a steady pace ever since. In addition, by 1987 at least twenty-four states had created special commissions or task forces on the family.<sup>9</sup> Five states in particular — California, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, and New York — took specific steps to address the needs of families.<sup>10</sup> And one state, Connecticut, passed an entire family policy package in 1987.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, even prominent think tanks began to devote greater time and effort to family policy issues.<sup>12</sup>

But what emerged at the state level was conspicuously absent at the federal level.



By the time Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency in 1981, the family had already made its way onto the political agenda in Washington. But its very presence was in sharp contrast to Reagan's basic political philosophy. It also ran counter to his approach to social policy, which was guided by three major themes: decentralize, informalize, and privatize. It is not surprising, therefore, that whatever political energy was generated during the Carter years and directed toward the White House in 1981 was quickly deflected back to the states, particularly with respect to family issues. New federalism would determine the fate of family leave policy over the next twelve years. For the sake of clarity, and for discussion, I have divided this twelve-year time frame into two distinct segments, the debates in the states and the fate of family leave initiatives during the Reagan years.

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### **Debates in the States**

Although the first family leave bill in the nation's history was introduced by Congresswoman Pat Schroeder in 1985, the debates that followed at the federal level failed to produce any legislation until 1993. Both the Reagan and Bush administrations staunchly opposed the enactment of such a measure. However, a more energetic debate occurred in state legislatures. Over an eight-year period, while the original proposal stalled in Washington, nearly thirty states and the District of Columbia either debated or adopted some form of family leave policy.

Seven major policy issues, based on an analysis of the laws enacted by the various states between 1987 and 1993, were raised and debated. (1) Should such a bill cover public employees, private employees, or both? (2) What should be the size of the company to which it is applied? Fifty employees? One hundred employees? Two hundred? (3) What should be the length of the leave? Two weeks? Twelve weeks? Twenty-four weeks? (4) Who should be eligible? Pregnant women and new mothers only? What about a parent caring for a child or an adult child caring for an elderly parent? (5) Should benefit coverage continue during a leave of absence? For example, should health and dental care as well as disability insurance coverage remain intact for an employee on leave? (6) Should employees be guaranteed their jobs upon their return to work? (7) Will not the cost of such a leave policy burden companies, particularly small ones?

One issue that was never raised during any of the states' debates, except briefly in Massachusetts, was whether there should be any wage replacement for workers requesting leave.<sup>13</sup> After two years of debate at the state level, four states enacted family leave legislation in 1987: Connecticut, Minnesota, Oregon, and Rhode Island. Over the next six years another twenty or more states would follow, with each responding to the seven issues identified above in their own particular way. Meanwhile, momentum in support of comparable legislation at the federal level was building ever so slowly in Washington.

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### **Federal Family Leave Initiatives during the Reagan-Bush Years**

If states are indeed the "laboratories of democracy," as argued so convincingly by David Osborne, the debates on family leave that occurred in state legislatures helped

to establish the parameters for the policy debate that transpired in Congress.<sup>14</sup> Although the seven major issues identified above quickly generated political echoes in Washington, victory for the proponents would not come easily.

During both the Reagan and Bush administrations, opponents of a federal bill relied on three common arguments to block its enactment. First, they contended that most firms already voluntarily provided family leave, making government mandates unnecessary. Second, they argued that parents wanted child care, not family leave. And third, they focused on costs. That is, mandated leave would increase the cost of doing business, therefore placing American firms at a disadvantage in the global economy.

When Schroeder introduced the Parental and Disability Act in Congress in April 1985, she was not immediately confronted by the opposition. Although it moved quickly at first, it stalled in committee in 1986 during the latter days of the 99th Congress. However, in response to two lobbying groups, it would be reintroduced in the 100th Congress in 1987 with a new title, the Family and Medical Leave Act. One group insisted that the bill extend beyond mothers and include other family members. The other group, representing the “differently abled,” objected to the term “disability” and argued successfully for its replacement by the broader and less stigmatizing “medical.”<sup>15</sup>

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1987, H.R. 925 and S. 249, sponsored by Schroeder in the House and Dodd in the Senate, attracted many supporters and at least two major opponents. Both the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers quickly labeled it an unnecessary mandated benefit and argued that its passage would represent an unprecedented intrusion into the workplace by government.

More important perhaps was the introduction of a competing family leave bill by Republican Congresswoman Marge Roukema of New Jersey, the ranking minority member of the Subcommittee on Labor Management Relations of the House Education and Labor Committee. In contrast to the Schroeder-Dodd version, the Roukema bill applied to fewer companies, provided for fewer weeks of leave, and was more restrictive. Roukema’s action, however, opened the door for discussion and eventually a compromise. She was joined by other moderate Republicans, including congresswomen Olympia Snowe of Maine and Nancy Johnson of Connecticut and Senator James Jeffords of Vermont.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, the Senate version of the bill lay dormant and Chris Dodd, unlike Pat Schroeder, was unsuccessful in finding a Republican partner who could produce a counterproposal that would break the legislative gridlock. Without at least one GOP supporter, Dodd would need all nine Democratic votes on the Senate Labor Committee to avoid a tie and death for his bill. Equally significant, his reluctance to include elder care in his version because “he feared doing so would make the bill look less like a protection for children,” turned off some Democrats, including Howard Metzenbaum of Ohio.<sup>17</sup> Only after Dodd rewrote the bill to resemble the House version more closely did Republican senators Lowell Weicker and Robert Stafford of Vermont break ranks and help push the proposal forward.

In the fall of 1988, only months before the close of the 100th Congress, the Senate version went to the floor only to be slowed by South Carolina Republican Senator Strom Thurmond’s attachment of an ant-child pornography bill and then stopped by a Republican filibuster led by Bob Dole of Kansas. The Democrats countered by

resurrecting the Act for Better Child Care (ABC) and attaching it to the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), a strategy that may not only have divided and weakened supporters of both bills but probably galvanized the opposition as well.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the fact that the ABC had been tabled for a year, the Children's Defense Fund and other child advocacy organizations were lobbying hard for its adoption when the FMLA went to the floor of the Senate. For some it meant fighting a battle on two fronts. "Almost everyone in the parental leave coalition was also working on the child bill," stated Sammie Moshenberg of the National Coalition for Jewish Women. "In my own organization, I could not tell you which was a greater priority."<sup>19</sup>

In either case, neither bill ever reached Ronald Reagan's desk in the Oval Office. Already pronounced dead in the House, they were eventually pulled from the floor of the Senate by Democratic majority leader Robert Byrd of West Virginia on October 7, 1988, following the Democrats' failure to overcome a Republican filibuster. So through a combination of a reluctant Congress, a divided coalition that was forced to lobby two important bills simultaneously, à la *Sophie's Choice*, a weakened president in the lame-duck phase of his administration, and strong opposition from the business lobby, the Family and Medical Leave Act died before George Bush was elected president in November 1988.

When *Time* named George Bush its Man of the Year, it indicated that there were two presidents, and the "foreign President Bush" was much different from the "domestic President Bush."<sup>20</sup> In foreign affairs Bush saw his approval ratings soar to more than 90 percent during a brief period in which he witnessed the collapse of the Soviet Union, the reunification of East and West Germany, and the United Nations' victory in the Gulf War, for which he received much of the credit. His repeated reference to America's role in a "new world order" was well received by the general public.<sup>21</sup>

Bush's domestic policy, however, was quite another matter. Some have even argued, for example, that excluding Reagan, "Bush has had the most limited domestic agenda of any president since Hoover."<sup>22</sup> Bush began his presidency with the themes a "kinder, gentler nation" and "a thousand points of light" and ended it by defending a sluggish economy that his opponent described in a campaign sound bite, "It's the economy, stupid." Like Reagan, Bush saw little or no role for government in addressing many of the nation's domestic challenges. He had "an almost 19th-century approach to social ills. The answer is not government, but the kindness of individuals."<sup>23</sup>

But the explanation for Bush's limited domestic policy may extend well beyond his preference for limited government involvement in addressing the nation's social problems. On entering the White House in 1989, he was immediately confronted with a political reality that would haunt him for the next four years: although he won the presidency, his party lost ground in Congress, primarily because many Bush voters split their tickets and voted for Democratic congressional candidates. As a result, Bush ran behind the winning ticket in 85 percent of the House districts.<sup>24</sup> And if he was weak under the 101st Congress, he became even weaker after the 1990 off-year election and the termination of the 102nd Congress. With his party already down 85 seats in the House and 10 in the Senate, Bush and the Republicans lost additional seats.



Not surprisingly, faced with an aggressive Democratic Congress, Bush's legislative strategy on domestic issues during the 101st and 102nd Congresses was more reactive than proactive, an approach that produced 25 vetoes in his first three years in office and resulted in only one veto ever being overridden by Congress during his four-year term.<sup>25</sup> The veto or threat of veto were both employed by Bush to defeat and shape family leave and child care legislation, respectively, during his term.

But it is difficult to discuss the fate of the family leave bill as if it existed in some sort of political vacuum. It, like other policy proposals, became entangled with an assortment of legislative initiatives that would produce synergistic effects and to one degree or another shape policy outcomes. Thus, in analyzing family leave policy during this time, it is imperative that it be discussed within the context of the debate over child care legislation, which was occurring simultaneously.

It was during the 1988 presidential campaign that a Gallup poll in May and a *New York Times* survey in July reported that more than half the respondents desired an increase in federal day care spending.<sup>26</sup> With opponent Michael Dukakis supporting the Democratic versions of the ABC bill and family leave, candidate Bush responded by proposing a tax credit program to support day care and argued that corporations should voluntarily adopt family leave policies rather than be mandated to do so by government.

When Congress reconvened in 1989, House and Senate Republicans introduced the Bush version of the ABC bill. Believing that the real problem was not the regulation of supply of child care but rather that working families needed more income, they pushed for a "toddler tax credit" of \$1,000 for families with up to two children under age five. This approach also allowed for "parental choice" of child care, be it a relative, a neighbor, or a private organization.<sup>27</sup>

In the Senate, Republican Orrin Hatch of Utah veered away from Bush slightly in trying to address concerns over the supply of day care. He proposed a \$250 million a year block grant to be administered by the states over three years, combined with the Bush tax credit proposal. Bush, however, opposed Hatch's block grant approach. The Democrats, on the other hand, continued to support the original ABC bill introduced during the Reagan years.

It became clear early on that the adoption of child care legislation would not come easily. To outside observers it was also clear that in order to pass child care, many of the key players in the game would have to change uniform. Orrin Hatch would alienate fellow Republicans and aggravate President Bush by joining Democrats in support of the block grant approach. Congressman Tom Downey of New York, head of an influential House Ways and Means subcommittee, would split with his Democratic colleagues and support a version of Bush's toddler tax credit. Key ABC lobbying groups, such as the National Education Association and the American Jewish Committee, attacked Marian Wright Edelman and most of the feminist organizations when Edelman and the feminists agreed to the Republican proposal of vouchers to fund care in religion-sponsored child care centers. Edelman's position also angered Democratic Congressman Augustus Hawkins of California, chair of the House Education and Labor Committee, who was vehemently opposed to vouchers, primarily because he sought funds to expand the Head Start program.<sup>28</sup>

Following a year of debate, gridlock, and eventual compromise, the Child Care and Development Block Grant was signed into law by President Bush in October

1990 as part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act. The final version of the bill may reveal more about the state of Congress in the 1990s than the nation's commitment to children. In the end, the act included \$732 million to be distributed by the states, a tax credit that applied to children under age thirteen whose family income did not exceed 75 percent of the state median income, and the expansion of Head Start to provide full workday and full calendar year service. It included religious organizations as providers but excluded public schools, and standards on health and safety are to be created and enforced by the states, not the federal government.

While child care would achieve success during the Bush years, family leave would experience a different fate, as it became stalled for years over the issue of government mandates versus corporate choice. In an attempt to break the impasse, Marge Roukema promised Republican support for the bill provided the Democrats promised not to use it to open the door to other mandated benefits such as child care and health insurance. Chris Dodd and Democratic Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts, however, saw nothing wrong with mandating benefits for unprotected employees. "They thought such a strategy was entirely proper, in view of the Reagan-Bush policies of low taxes, high corporate profits, and federal budget deficit accumulations."<sup>29</sup>

By May 1990 the original Schroeder bill introduced during the Reagan administration was modified to cover only those businesses with fifty or more employees. It called for twelve weeks of unpaid leave to employees but maintained health benefits and job guarantees. Had it been adopted, it would have affected only 5 percent of employers and 44 percent of employees. The proponents and opponents were familiar faces, and their positions were predictable. For example, the Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the National Federation of Independent Businesses argued that the bill supported by "organized labor and the more radical feminist groups . . . is just the first step toward 100 percent coverage and paid leave."<sup>30</sup>

After passing in the House by a vote of 237 to 187 and by a voice vote in the Senate, President Bush kept his promise and vetoed the measure on June 14, 1990. A House effort to override his veto failed eleven days later. The bill, however, would emerge again two years later in the midst of the presidential election and Bush would veto it a second time. How it became entangled with family values during the 1992 presidential campaign and why it was eventually adopted by Congress and signed into law is discussed below.

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### **Family Values, Family Leave, and the 1992 Election**

Family values as a campaign issue was catapulted onto the 1992 presidential campaign by a rather convoluted assortment of characters and events that included Rodney King, a victim of police brutality; a riot in South Central Los Angeles that followed a controversial jury verdict; a fictitious TV character and single mom, Murphy Brown; a feisty vice president, Dan Quayle; a special speech on families delivered in Cleveland by candidate Bill Clinton; and a night devoted to "family values" at the Republican Party's nominating convention. The ultimate outcome was the election of a new president, a reassessment of how seemingly unrelated events can shape social policy in America, and the push to get more family-oriented issues



onto the political agenda. How and why this has occurred deserves some explanation.

In the spring of 1992, several Los Angeles police officers who were accused of excessive force in the videotaped beating of Rodney King, an African-American male who was stopped for a traffic violation, were acquitted by an all-white jury in a conservative suburban community of Los Angeles. The verdict produced a riot in the predominantly black community of South Central Los Angeles, resulting in numerous deaths and major losses of property. Several days later Dan Quayle appeared on national television and blamed the L.A. riots on the deterioration of the American family. He also blamed Hollywood for its anti-family bias that produced such shows as *Murphy Brown*, in which the main character, a highly successful career woman, chose to have a child through artificial insemination and raise it without a father. This outburst by Quayle prompted a response from the Democratic Party's leading candidate for the presidential nomination.

In early May, approximately two weeks after Dan Quayle's attack on *Murphy Brown*, Bill Clinton delivered a speech in Cleveland, Ohio, in which he outlined his "eight-point plan on the American family." His proposal included an intense media campaign to combat teen pregnancy, an \$800-per-child tax credit for preschool children, an expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, a greater emphasis on child support, a call for more child-sensitive divorce laws, more parental responsibility, greater emphasis placed on family preservation programs, and the adoption of a family leave policy.<sup>31</sup>

Two months later the Republicans devoted an entire evening to "family values" at their nominating convention while a Democratic Congress sought to embarrass President Bush by pressuring him to sign the Family and Medical Leave Act. Beginning on the eve of the Republican National Convention, the Senate approved its version of the bill by a voice vote on August 11. Although Senator Dodd favored a roll call vote, Republican leaders threatened to block it, thus preventing the bill from leaving the Senate before the August recess, scheduled to begin August 13.

Despite growing support from such conservative Republicans as senators Kit Bond of Missouri and Dan Coats of Indiana and congressmen Tom Coleman of Missouri, Bill Young of Florida, and James Saxton of New Jersey, who were recruited through a variety of Democratic concessions, the Bush administration continued to oppose the proposed legislation. "They were not willing to deal," stated Bond. "I think the president is just plain wrong on this . . . and . . . it is a failure to reinforce what is a very important part of his platform."<sup>32</sup>

As the 1992 presidential campaign continued, the House passed the measure on September 10 by a 241 to 161 vote, and Republicans described the bill as an election-year ploy designed to embarrass Bush. On September 16, President Bush announced an alternative to the Democratic bill. Instead of government mandates, he argued, businesses should be offered tax incentives. That is, a refundable tax credit of 20 percent of compensation — up to \$100 a week to a maximum total of \$1,200 — would be available for all businesses with fewer than 500 employees for a period of family leave of up to twelve weeks. More important, argued the president, his proposal would have covered about 15 million more workers and twenty times the number of workplaces than the Democratic version.

The day after his announcement, Congress sent its bill to the White House for Bush's promised veto. For Roukema, a longtime supporter of family leave, Bush's



alternative was “an interesting supplement to the basic bill. But it is no substitute. To use the tax incentives does not give the job guarantee,” she said.<sup>33</sup> Republican Congressman Dick Armey of Texas, who opposed family leave from its inception, described the timing of Bush’s proposal as “unfortunate.” “To the extent the president’s proposal is political, it’s in response to the timing of the Democrats,” Armey continued. “They thought this is a great time to embarrass the president by sending him a family leave bill so close to the election.”<sup>34</sup>

With Congress ignoring his plea, Bush vetoed the Family and Medical Leave Act for a second time on September 22. “I want to strongly reiterate that I have always supported employer policies to give time off for a child’s birth or adoption or for family illness and believe it is important that employers offer these benefits,” he stated in his veto message. “I object, however, to the federal government mandating leave policies for America’s employers and work force.”<sup>35</sup>

Two days later, and after four years and thirty-two vetoes from President Bush, the Senate finally produced enough votes to override his opposition to a bill. Voting 68 to 31, two votes more than the two-thirds necessary, the Senate refused to sustain the president’s veto on September 24. Within a week, however, the House failed to override the veto. On September 30, by a vote of 258 to 169, the veto override attempt fell short by 27 votes. Not to be overlooked is the fact that forty-two Democrats voted to sustain the president’s position.<sup>36</sup> The bill was dead for the 102nd Congress.

In November Bill Clinton became the first Democrat to be elected president in twelve years. With his victory, the 103rd Congress underwent a major transformation. The 1992 elections produced 110 new House members and 13 new senators, including unprecedented numbers of women and minorities. In the Senate, the number of women increased from 2 to 6; in the House, the number of women grew from 29 to 48. But the newcomers did little to change the partisan composition of the two houses. The Democrats’ 57 to 43 advantage in the Senate was identical to that of the 102nd Congress, and the 258 to 176 to 1 House edge represented a loss of only 10 seats. In contrast to the Reagan-Bush era, there would be little discussion of the number of votes necessary to override presidential vetoes.<sup>37</sup> Owing perhaps to the near doubling of females in Congress, family-oriented issues in general, and the family leave bill in particular, received increased attention even before Bill Clinton was sworn into office.

Between Election Day and Inauguration Day, both the House (265 to 163) and the Senate (71 to 27) acted favorably on the Family and Medical Leave Act. Not surprisingly, the key players in the legislative debate took predictable positions on the familiar territory they had staked out as early as 1985. The National Federation of Independent Businesses, the National Association of Manufacturers, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Concerned Alliance of Responsible Employers argued against the bill. They were countered again by the American Association of Retired Persons, the Children’s Defense Fund, and the Women’s Legal Defense Fund. Unlike the child care coalition of the 1970s that weakened over an eight-year period, however, the FMLA coalition grew stronger by using its eight-year period to bring even old enemies into the tent. “By making common cause with antiabortion conservatives, the basic core of feminists and liberals had performed the essential trick that turns ideas into laws. They surrounded the opposition and minimized it.”<sup>38</sup>

In essence, the battle ended when Congressman Henry Hyde, the conservative

Republican from Illinois, took the floor of the House just weeks before Clinton's inaugural and spoke in favor of the bill. While this image may serve as a description of what happened in the end, an explanation of how it all came about might be found in the statements of two key antagonists. "It hurt us to see it referred to as 'watered down,' but it helped with the numbers," explained Donna Lenhoff of the Women's Legal Defense Fund, describing the proponents' legislative strategy.<sup>39</sup> On the other side, Mary Tavenner of the Concerned Alliance of Responsible Employers said, "If we had not been there family leave would have passed as written. We made them change it. The bill became more and more 'reasonable' until inevitably some businesses were neutralized."<sup>40</sup>

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, signed by Bill Clinton during a ceremony in the White House Rose Garden on an unusually warm February 5, represented the first major piece of legislation signed by the new president. As a result, employees in companies with fifty or more workers have the right to twelve weeks of unpaid leave to care for a child, a spouse, an ailing parent, or oneself. The bill also guaranteed job security and required an employer to continue health care benefits during the leave of absence. Finally, the act permitted a company to deny leave to a salaried employee who falls within the higher paid 10 percent of its workforce.

With the passage of the FMLA, however, at least three perplexing questions emerged and remain with us: (1) Why did President Bush wait so long to offer an alternative to the Democrats' proposal, particularly if he believed the opposition party was deliberately attempting to embarrass him over the family values issue and why didn't he offer his tax incentive proposal sooner? (2) With Clinton riding high on a presidential victory that brought with it a Democratic-controlled Congress, why did he not seize the opportunity to push for a much stronger family leave bill? Why, especially during the honeymoon phase of his administration when his political influence was probably at its zenith, did the newly elected president choose to settle for the minimum and thus provide the nation with one more example of what some may label as symbolic politics? (3) Because it is unpaid and applies to only 5 percent of the corporations and 60 percent of the workforce, how effective can it be in addressing the caregiving needs of America's families?

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### **Family Values and Family Leave in the 1996 Election**

The Department of Labor's Commission on Family and Medical Leave, chaired by Senator Chris Dodd, released its report in April 1996. It reached two major conclusions: relatively few (7 percent) of the eligible employees are actually taking leave for "FMLA reasons," and so far the act has cost employers very little for administration.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, President Clinton made it clear that if elected to a second term in 1996 he would seek to expand the FMLA in two ways. Two days will be added to the twelve weeks so that parents may visit their children's schools for parent-teacher conferences or use the time to accompany a family member to a physician's office, and if the FMLA is expanded, employees will be able to cash in their overtime hours for time off to address family needs.

What worked for the Democrats in the 1992 election was employed again in 1996. Choosing Families First as their campaign theme, the Democrats captured, at least temporarily, what Steiner refers to as "the higher moral ground" on family values.<sup>42</sup> Not only did Bill Clinton remind the voters that the Family and Medical

Leave Act was the first bill he ever signed as president, but also that his opponent, Bob Dole, had voted against it twice and had engineered Republican attempts to kill the measure on the Senate floor.

Most blatantly, perhaps, the Democrats selected September 24, 1996, as Family Leave Day to remind voters that on that date four years earlier, Bob Dole had voted to uphold George Bush's veto of the bill. Family advocates, business leaders, and key legislators across the nation held special news events in forty-four states not only to highlight the success of President Clinton's Family and Medical Leave Act but to bash Bob Dole in the process. This approach was similar to the Clinton campaign's efforts in forty-six states on September 18, which drew attention to the administration's anti-crime record. That event alone generated more than 500 local television news stories.<sup>43</sup>

Family Leave Day was developed by Ann F. Lewis, the deputy campaign manager for communications. She was assisted by Stephanie Foster, manager of the campaign's women's outreach initiatives; Stacie Spector, the deputy communications director for field communications; and Donna Lenhoff, one of the original architects of the FMLA and a volunteer on leave from her position as general counsel for the Women's Legal Defense Fund. President Clinton, Vice President Gore, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Tipper Gore kicked off the nationwide events in New Jersey, Louisiana, Connecticut, and Tennessee, respectively.<sup>44</sup>

In a relatively brief twenty-three-minute talk in front of a Freehold, New Jersey, Revolutionary War monument, President Clinton reminded his audience that it was his administration that enacted the Family and Medical Leave Act. "You hear people talking all the time about family values. Well, if we're going to talk about family values, shouldn't we value families?" the president asked. "I never go anywhere in America — never — that I don't meet families who have at least one or two examples in their own lives where they have felt the wrenching conflict between their responsibilities to their children or their parents, and their responsibilities at work."<sup>45</sup> Standing by his side were David Del Vecchio, a candidate for the 12th district, and Congressman Bob Torricelli, the Democratic candidate who was seeking to capture the U.S. Senate seat vacated by Bill Bradley.

Campaigning in Southern states where Republicans have strong support, Vice President Gore appealed to moderate voters by pushing the president's proposal to expand the existing Family and Medical Leave Act to cover short periods of unpaid time off for medical appointments and PTA meetings. Speaking in Shreveport, Louisiana, the vice president also took a swipe at Bob Dole for his position on family leave. "Again, if we're going to say we value strong families . . . then we've got to be willing to put our laws where our political rhetoric is."<sup>46</sup> Mary Landrieu, Louisiana's Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate, was standing by the vice president's side. "Guess who voted against it?" Landrieu asked the crowd of supporters. "Bob Dole, six times"<sup>47</sup>

Hillary Rodham Clinton, speaking at Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut, on September 24, reminded the audience that it was her husband who signed the FMLA and that it was Bob Dole who opposed it, emphasizing once more that "while Republicans talk about family values, Democrats prove that they value families."<sup>48</sup> Representatives from two families who used family leave in the past and



were therefore thankful for its existence appeared with the First Lady. Her visit was also aimed at boosting Congressman Sam Gejdenson's reelection bid. Just two years earlier he had defeated his opponent by only twenty-one votes.

Appearing at several rallies in Tennessee on September 24, Tipper Gore also highlighted the virtues of family leave while reminding voters that Bob Dole's labeling of Bill Clinton as a liberal was a distortion. "When I think of this administration, 'liberal' does not come to mind. We're very much middle of the road. The Democratic campaign's emphasis on family issues and values could be labeled conservative," she said.<sup>49</sup> Mrs. Gore appeared with Tennessee politicians who had supported the FMLA and several families who had benefited from it. She visited the Johnson City Medical Center Children's Hospital and participated in a round table discussion at the Ronald McDonald House nearby. She later joined another round table discussion on the attributes of the FMLA at a private home in Clarksville.

Concurrently, similar events were being held across the country. Department of Labor Secretary Robert Reich participated in radio interviews in Boston and Worcester, Massachusetts. In Florida, Governor Lawton Chiles held a news conference at Wackenhutt Security Firm in West Palm Beach. In Atlanta, at a Ben and Jerry's ice cream shop, Vicki and George Yandel also held a news conference. Mr. Yandel was fired when he took time off from work to be with his dying daughter. Ben and Jerry's was the chosen site because the company had provided family leave benefits to its employees prior to the passage of the 1993 act. In Indianapolis, Indiana, Governor Evan Bayh sponsored a workshop on father-friendly workplaces. Of all the Family Leave Day events organized in forty-four states, very few did not include politicians who were competing for office. Clearly, the Family and Medical Leave Act had become valuable political currency for Democrats in the 1996 campaign.

But while the Democrats continued to hit Bob Dole over the head with the family leave issue in 1996 as they had done with George Bush four years earlier, the Republican response was ineffective. Candidate Dole continued to emphasize that he had opposed the bill in 1992 and that he would do so again if he were still in the Senate and it came to the floor for a vote. Instead of taking family leave head-on, Bob Dole and the Republicans attempted to corner Bill Clinton on family values by enacting two particular pieces of legislation in the summer before the election: the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 and the Defense of Marriage Act.

With respect to the former act, Clinton surprised the Republicans by stating he would sign what many considered to be a harsh bill. Viewing it as "veto bait" that could be used against him later in the campaign, as the family leave bill was used against Bush in 1992, the president alienated many loyalists and lost some key White House staffers when he placed his signature on the legislation in August. His opponent could not accuse him of being soft on welfare.

With respect to the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), Clinton found himself negotiating a political minefield that was saturated with family values. Following a December 1995 court ruling in Hawaii that legalized same-sex marriages, state legislatures and members of Congress moved quickly to inoculate themselves against the recognition of such marital unions in other states or by the federal government. The passage of DOMA, clearly earmarked as veto bait, was part of a Republican strategy to embarrass the same president who spoke out strongly for gay rights in the military early in his term. A veto of the bill would jump-start a lethargic, if not dead, Dole camp just in time for the home stretch of the campaign.

Instead, President Clinton heeded the words of his adviser, Dick Morris, and practiced triangulation, a sailing technique of steering into a tough wind. It was the same procedure Clinton had applied to the Welfare Reform Act. Unlike the Family and Medical Leave Act signed by Clinton with much fanfare in the White House Rose Garden in February 1993, the Defense of Marriage Act was signed at 12:50 A.M. on the morning of September 21, 1996, just six weeks before the election, by a president sitting alone in the Oval Office. When he refused to bend to gay activists who demanded that he pull Democratic campaign spots on Christian radio stations that praised him for signing DOMA, the president was then heeding the advice offered by Robert Byrd on the floor of the U.S. Senate during a heated debate over the bill. "At some point," stated the West Virginia Democrat, "a line must be drawn by rational men and women who are willing to say 'Enough.'"<sup>50</sup>

Bob Dole had also had enough. Efforts to attack Bill Clinton on family values had failed miserably. What's worse, decisions made by the former senator four years earlier had been used to inflict serious damage on him during a campaign that would have had to be run flawlessly for him to at least have a chance of winning. With a strong economy staring him in the face, combined with failed attempts to corner the incumbent president on family values, Dole was finished politically. Consequently, although the Republicans would win both houses again, they would once again miss the opportunity to take the White House and have it all.

As the words from Bill Clinton's inaugural address drifted out over the nation on January 20, 1997, a soft echo from the not-too-distant past could be heard. Six and a half years earlier, on July 25, 1990, the White House was celebrating another failed override vote by Congress as the family leave bill went down to defeat. That evening, during a TV interview, David Gergen, a former Reagan communications director, criticized George Bush in general and the Republican Party in particular for missing the boat on family leave. "The issue was a winner for the Democrats," Gergen said, "because the Republicans were making it one."<sup>51</sup> The issue would keep returning again and again, he warned in 1990, and it would be bigger every time it came back.

In retrospect, one must ask several question related to the role played by family values in general and family leave policy in particular during the 1992 and 1996 presidential campaigns. First, why didn't George Bush respond sooner to the growing gender gap that was so visible to so many others in both parties? Why did he wait so long to offer his alternative tax incentive version of the family leave bill despite being pressured by key Republican leaders to act much sooner? Second, and perhaps even more puzzling, how could Bob Dole repeat the same mistake four years later? Had he and mainstream Republicans not learned a thing from Bush's failure in 1992? Third, why did the Democrats settle for so little in the end, having won both houses of Congress and the White House in 1992 for the first time in twelve years? Were the major compromises they made really worth the victory? Why didn't they push for more in 1992 when they had the upper hand politically?

Although the Democrats used the Family and Medical Leave Act effectively in 1992 and in 1996 by rolling the bill into their family values strategy, they also abused it shamelessly by portraying it as something much more than it actually was. For in the end, the FMLA provided no paid leave and applied only to 5 percent of corporations and 60 percent of the workforce. However, it did provide that rapidly growing confederacy of cynics with one more excellent example of symbolic politics. ❀

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# The Massachusetts Welfare to Work Program

## How Well Will It Serve Its Customers?

*Abigail Jurist Levy*

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*The author examined the initial two-year Massachusetts Welfare to Work plans to identify early signs of potential program strengths and weaknesses when the states were just beginning to implement it. She surveyed the then current literature that defines the work-first philosophy and its social context, outlining the essential elements of work-first programs for participants' success. The author then reviewed Massachusetts's sixteen regional plans to determine the degree to which they incorporated these elements in their program designs. Finally, she outlined the challenges, potential risks, and advantages that arise when national social policy shifts and local planners and policymakers must adapt theory to practice.*

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**M**y purpose in examining the initial Massachusetts Welfare to Work plans was to identify the early signs of potential program strengths and weaknesses. Because this program was in its first year of implementation and based on the fairly new "work first" philosophy, each region was inventing its program design and delivery scheme. Many regions looked to each other and to national program models for examples of best practice to help them in this work. The Corporation for Business, Work, and Learning (CBWL), in its role as administrator of Welfare to Work funds in Massachusetts, wished to serve as a technical assistance resource for the sixteen Massachusetts regions. This analysis helped CBWL to identify critical topics of interest to regional planners, deploy its technical assistance resources effectively, and develop a useful evaluation strategy for local programs.

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### Origins of the Welfare to Work Program

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) represents President Bill Clinton's welfare reform effort. Within it, the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program was created to replace the former Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). While the impact of this change is outside the scope of this work, it is important to point out the philosophical and policy shift that it represents. As stated in the Employment and Training

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Administration's (ETA) Interim Final Rule, 20 CFR, Part 645, "The TANF provisions substantially changed the nation's welfare system from one in which cash assistance was provided on an entitlement basis to a system in which the primary focus is on moving welfare recipients to work and promoting family responsibility, accountability, and self-sufficiency."<sup>1</sup>

This change in focus to moving welfare recipients to work and self-sufficiency — *not out of poverty* — within a limited period of time explains the creation of the Welfare to Work (WtW) program. Again, the ETA's Interim Final Rule explains: "The purpose of WtW is to provide *transitional* assistance which moves *hard-to-employ* welfare recipients living in *high poverty areas* into *unsubsidized* employment and *economic self-sufficiency* (italics added)."<sup>2</sup>

WtW provides federal funding to states for two years to provide a range of services to those most vulnerable and most likely to reach their time limits for receiving assistance. The goal of such services should be to place people in employment that will lead to economic self-sufficiency.

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### The Welfare to Work Program Structure

For WtW to accomplish its purpose, \$3 billion has been allocated nationwide — \$1.5 billion will be distributed in fiscal year 1998, the remaining \$1.5 billion in fiscal year 1999. States will be given three years to spend these funds, all of which must be spent by September 30, 2001. Seventy-five percent of the funds will be distributed to the states in each fiscal year according to a formula. To receive its portion, each state must match half of the federal allocation with its own funds. As a result, Massachusetts's WtW program will total approximately \$30 million. The remaining 25 percent of the funds will be distributed by the U.S. Department of Labor through competitive grants.

Each state must immediately transfer 85 percent of the program funds to its Private Industry Council. (In Massachusetts, except for the city of Boston, PICs are known as Regional Employment Boards.) PICs have authority over the design and implementation of WtW programs in their regions. The governor of a state may, at his or her discretion, use the remaining 15 percent of the funds to support the program.

Three key elements of the structure of the WtW program are important to consider in this discussion: eligibility, performance standards, and authority. Programs will be evaluated by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) according to their ability to meet the needs of participants who will be, by definition, the hardest to serve. To be eligible for participation in the WtW program, individuals must be long-term recipients or face termination from welfare in twelve months and have two of the three following characteristics: (1) lack of a high school diploma or general equivalency diploma and low mathematics or reading skills; (2) require substance abuse treatment; and (3) a poor work history. At least 70 percent of the funds must be spent on individuals or noncustodial parents of children in TANF households who meet these criteria. Up to 30 percent of the funds may be spent to assist other individuals who are TANF recipients or noncustodial parents who have the characteristics associated with long-term welfare dependency, namely, school dropout, teen parent, and poor work history. One hundred million dollars will be set aside from the 1999 available funds for performance bonuses to states to be awarded by the secretary of labor in fiscal year 2000.



As of early April 1998, DOL has provided only minimal guidance on expected program outcomes and performance standards. Other than its general statement of purpose, there are still no specific standards or definitions to guide program planners or operators. For example, "economic self-sufficiency" has not been defined, nor have the variety of ways in which a participant may exit the program been categorized as positive or negative outcomes. Without a common standard of program success, each region in Massachusetts has defined success for itself or, more worrisome, declined to do so. In any event, the likely impact for welfare participants is uneven quality of services from one region to another as a result of varying program goals, standards of success, local resources, and abilities. Such variation in program designs will be clearly seen in Massachusetts's local plans.

Finally, it is important to note where the program authority rests when considering how best to address program weaknesses. Never before has so much authority for a job training program been given to the local level by the federal government. In contrast, the role of the state in providing guidance and maintaining standards and consistencies across programs is extremely limited because of its limited authority. As a result, each region may, and will, design its program differently; Massachusetts will have sixteen distinct WtW programs rather than just one. Therefore we have a significant opportunity to learn about the effectiveness of different program approaches and components, with little leverage to encourage regions' use of best practice or foster learning across regions.

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### **What Welfare to Work Offers: The Work-First Approach**

Briefly, the work-first approach to job training maintains that the best way for welfare recipients to become self-sufficient is to enter the labor market as quickly as possible. The best preparation for work is work itself, and any job is viewed as a good job, providing a starting point and an opportunity for recipients to develop work habits and skills that, over time, allow them to move on to better jobs.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, the work-first approach is characterized by a focus on both the employer and the individual as equally important customers. Employers' needs are the drivers for all education, training, and work preparation activities. Program planners' chief task is to assess and even anticipate the skill requirements of local employers in order to provide them with job candidates they will be likely to hire and retain.

Two very different perspectives, one on workforce development and the other on limiting public assistance, converge to promote the work-first philosophy for the program. The workforce development perspective fosters this view of training largely as a result of ten years of experiments with school-to-work efforts. Jobs for the Future (JFF), a national policy organization that focuses on youth development, asserts that well-designed workplace experiences, tied to supports and learning opportunities outside of work, can have powerful effects on the attitudes, aspirations, and performance of young people. There is growing evidence from the school-to-work movement that work-based learning improves self-esteem and teaches and reinforces basic and technical skills. It also provides a valuable opportunity to understand workplace culture and expectations.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, there are important differences between the ways youths and adults make the

transition to work. However, evidence from JFF research suggests that lessons from work-based learning approaches can be useful in the welfare to work environment to help low-skill adult workers get and keep better jobs. These lessons include the importance of mentoring relationships, contextual learning and instruction, and credentialing skills learned at work.<sup>5</sup>

The second perspective, the public's growing pressure to limit the time for recipients' public assistance, combines with the lessons from school-to-work to create an environment in which the focus is on immediate employment, vis-à-vis job search and retention, rather than job preparation. As a result of this goal, services in a work-first environment are offered only briefly on short-term pre-employment services, for example, job search activities and work preparation services lasting an average of only three to four weeks. They are more thoroughly concentrated on longer-term post-placement services that may include basic education, English as a second language, occupational skills training, mentoring, transportation, child care, substance abuse treatment, and counseling. While the WtW regulations severely limit pre-employment services, they allow post-employment services to continue almost indefinitely. In fact, one issue discussed by Massachusetts program planners is the definition of "program completion." At present, there are no regulations to determine when a participant has completed her involvement and exited the program.

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### Differences between WtW and Other Approaches

It is important to consider how the work-first philosophy departs from other approaches to workforce development when assessing its potential risks for participants and employers. The WtW initiative follows a forty-year growth in programs offering training for employment. Following the manpower demonstration programs launched in the 1960s and funded through the Manpower Development Training Act, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act emerged in the 1970s, as did the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) in the 1980s. JTPA was accompanied by the welfare system's Job Opportunity and Basic Skills program of the Family Support Act of 1988. Over time, programs have been developed for specific populations, such as dislocated workers, older workers, and youth. States have funded their own workforce development and economic development programs to meet specific needs of communities and employers, and proprietary schools have also expanded.<sup>6</sup>

One result of this expansion in training programs is that a distinction has grown between "education" and "job training." In *Learning to Work: The Case for Reintegrating Job Training and Education*, W. Norton Grubb characterizes the differences between education and training. I have summarized them here because they describe significant ways in which job training in general and the WtW program are vulnerable.<sup>7</sup>

1. Job training programs are shorter in length than education programs. Typical training programs may last from ten to fifteen weeks, with as few as forty contact hours. The shortest common postsecondary programs last two semesters on average with about 360 to 1000 contact hours.

2. Educational programs are open to all members of a community, but job training programs are available only to those who are eligible through having experienced some significant problems related to their employment.

3. Job training programs are offered in a variety of settings with no commonly accepted standards or practices, while educational programs are offered in institutions that have standards and are institutionalized.

4. Services in educational programs are standardized to a large degree, while those offered through job training programs vary greatly from one program to another. The design of programs, the mix of services, their duration, and their quality are all quite different.

5. The goal of job training programs is to enable participants to find employment, while the goals of education are much broader and ambiguous. The specificity of training programs allows them to be evaluated more easily and they have a long history of analysis, while educational programs have escaped public scrutiny until the last ten years.

6. Job training has been federally funded for the most part, while education has been supported at the state and local levels. As a result, states have a greater commitment to their educational system than they do to federal training programs.

7. The educational system offers a continuum of services from early childhood education through the university level. If someone leaves the educational system without the ability to find employment, the training system becomes his or her second chance. However, the second-chance system, which is vulnerable to political pressures, has been revised by nearly every president. As a result, it is more unstable and less defined than the education system.

Just as the social climate propels training programs toward faster entry into employment, we have increasing evidence that the surest path to a stable family wage is through long-term education. In MassINC's *Closing the Gap: Raising Skills to Raise Wages*, Edward Moscovitch charts the increases in real earnings for Massachusetts families between 1979 and 1994.<sup>8</sup> Moscovitch shows that the earning power of persons with less than a high school diploma fell from \$26,842 in 1979 to about \$22,664 in 1994, while the earning power of college graduates increased from \$58,779 in 1979 to \$69,652 in 1994.

Moscovitch points out, however, that the best illustration of the importance of college education is the increasing premium that is placed on it in Massachusetts, even in light of the increasing number of college graduates available to employers. As the number of college graduates increased from 20.5 percent in 1979 to 32.0 percent in 1994, one would expect that employers would pay them lower salaries. In fact, the 11.5 percent increase of college graduates enjoyed an 18.5 percent increase in earnings. National income data for women is even more dramatic. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, "The Condition of Education, 1997," women college graduates earned 91 percent more in 1995 than women with a high school diploma, while those with some college increased their earnings by more than 28 percent.

Although data showing the value of an associate degree in Massachusetts is less comprehensive, Moscovitch cites national data from the Survey Research Center of the University of California at Berkeley showing that in 1990, men with an associate degree earned 26.8 percent more than their counterparts with a high school diploma. Similarly, women associate degree holders earned 37.4 percent more than women with only a high school diploma.



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## Risks of the Work-First Philosophy

The overarching concern with the work-first philosophy is eloquently expressed by Jobs for the Future, one of its chief supporters. The school-to-work effort has proved the importance of integrating workplace learning and school-based learning. However,

In its determination to make work the centerpiece of welfare policy, the new welfare legislation creates disincentives to pre-employment education and training. Contrary to evidence that argues for creative strategies to integrate work- and classroom-based learning, welfare reform promotes the *substitution* of work experience for educational programming. The pendulum will have to swing back toward greater integration with the education system if welfare reform is going to help a large segment of the population keep, and advance in, jobs.<sup>9</sup>

Grubb echoes this concern in *Learning to Work*.

As it now stands, virtually the only way to get low-income individuals out of poverty or off welfare is to get them into education programs, like the certificate and associate degree programs of community colleges that have prospects for enhancing earnings . . . The disconnection of education from job training . . . has been counterproductive for both. Many of the reasons . . . for the ineffectiveness of job training . . . come from this divorce.<sup>10</sup>

Risks encountered by individual participants and employers include the following.

1. The target population for WtW programs, the hardest sector to employ, is comprised of persons with poor work histories, math and reading skills, and substance abuse problems. Evidence shows that this group fared poorly in earlier work-first programs. For example, an analysis of the Riverside GAIN program, one of the most publicized WtW efforts, shows that three years after enrollment, only 23 percent of the participants were employed and no longer received AFDC payments. Moreover, within eleven months of orientation, 35 percent of welfare participants were deferred — *not* an explicit option in the WtW program — because of illness, family crises, emotional or mental problems, alcohol or drug addiction, legal difficulties, lack of child care and transportation.<sup>11</sup>

Just as alarming, the most disadvantaged participants in San Diego's Saturation Work Initiative Model experienced significant reductions in AFDC payments after completing the program but had *no* significant gains in earnings. Three years after starting the program, 41.3 percent of participants were still receiving AFDC assistance.<sup>12</sup>

2. Program success relies heavily on employers making positions available to welfare participants and to providing opportunities for post-employment training and advancement. Although unemployment is low in Massachusetts at the moment, the majority of entry-level jobs are in regions that raise significant transportation and child care obstacles for likely welfare employees.<sup>13</sup> A slowdown in the economy and an increase in unemployment will further complicate employment prospects for welfare workers.<sup>14</sup>

Of even more concern to the WtW program, research illustrates that employers are reluctant to invest in training when they doubt that they will recoup their costs.<sup>15</sup> They might be unwilling to train for a variety of reasons, one of which is certainly

worker mobility and high turnover. In any event, without significant employer commitment to training welfare employees, the likelihood of participants advancing in their careers and achieving economic self-sufficiency is severely threatened.

3. Finally, the Corporation for Business, Work, and Learning (CBWL) has had a great deal of practical experience in training incumbent workers in companies as large as Malden Mills and as small as a ten-person metalworking shop. Even when employers are eager to train their employees, the many other pressures of business often make this quite difficult. For example, finding adequate space to train along with the time and available machinery and qualified, able trainers, managing last minute changes in production schedules, and so on, all present significant obstacles to training.

WtW post-placement training and support services can be provided only to welfare employees. Employers face a number of challenges in balancing the needs of a diverse workforce who are not all eligible for the same supports and services. Significant management problems arise when only a segment of a company's workforce is entitled to receive benefits that many others would like to have. Dealing constructively with such conflicts requires considerable management skill. In addition, making the transition from welfare to work is not a simple process for most individuals. Inevitably, welfare employees must cope with problems that necessarily spill over into their lives at work. The ability to recognize and deal with such events also requires skill, experience, and willingness on the part of employers. Many are not immediately equipped to handle the situations that arise.<sup>16</sup>

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### **Lessons from the Field: Critical Program Features**

A review of evaluation literature specific to WtW programs suggests that successful plans share the common features described below.

1. *Conscious shift to a work-first philosophy.* This shift should pervade the program from frontline staff to operation and service delivery systems. Program staff must convey the message that preparing for and attaining work is the primary goal of the program in their everyday work with participants.<sup>17</sup> Reinforcing that message while supporting individuals is a crucial mix of messages and skills. Denver's ACES program staff provided this advice to other practitioners: "To be honest, enthusiastic, encouraging, empathetic, and compassionate in assisting this client population and, at the same time, continue to help them remember their initial vision and goals of being in the program: self-sufficiency."<sup>18</sup>

In addition to staff impact, however, the right range of services should be available to participants so that their varied needs can be met. There must also be enough flexibility in program operations to enable participants to access services easily and at the appropriate time. Last, rather than focusing on "process" as programs have in the past, services must be designed and delivered with a career path consciousness, meaning that whether counseling, transportation, training, or mentoring is being provided, its content will in some way contribute to the advancement of the participants' careers.<sup>19</sup>

2. *Emphasis on case management.* A case manager should remain involved with each participant from the outset of the program until its completion. This relationship is critical to participant success, so caseloads need to be reasonable. The case manager's responsibilities and authority must be clear to all parties so that there can be a

swift and effective advocate for clients, identifying needs, accessing services, actively assisting in job search, working with employers, et cetera.<sup>20</sup>

3. *Communication and coordination of services.* Most successful WtW programs involve a variety of staff, often at more than one agency or community-based organization. Communication and coordination of services is critical if employer and participant needs are to be met efficiently. Linkages between agencies should be developed early on in the planning stage, and responsibilities clearly assigned. Resources, whether financial, staff time, space, and more, should be pooled so that partners share a stake in program outcomes. Shared location is also a factor critical to assisting in communication between staff and ease of access for participants and employers. Finally, creating formal interagency teams builds a structure in which problems and client progress can be addressed and future planning can be undertaken.<sup>21</sup>

4. *Employer involvement.* The Center for Employment Training (CET) in San Jose, California, is a landmark example of the impact of including employers. CET has made a practice of working closely with area employers from the outset, involving them in program planning, continually fostering their commitment to hiring welfare employees, and working with them in coordinating post-placement services. This kind of close relationship with employers is one critical explanation for CET's impacts on earnings. One random assignment evaluation targeting single parents found that CET participants earned, on average, \$2,062 (22 percent) more than control group members after a thirty-month follow-up period. More recent data show that earnings gains were still holding up after five years.<sup>22</sup> Unless WtW programs are closely linked to the employers in the area, the chances for placement and advancement of participants are greatly reduced.<sup>23</sup>

5. *Outcome orientation.* This important feature ensures that program resources will be strategically focused. It requires a knowledge of the needs and attributes of program clients along with their specific program goals and outcomes. The goals should be clearly articulated and activities, services, and resources targeted in support of them.<sup>24</sup>

6. *Strong support services.* Not surprisingly, the provision of child care and transportation to and from work and, in some cases, to and from child care, were the most critical support services, without which program failure was virtually assured. In addition, furnishing appropriate work clothes, referrals for housing and medical needs, and alcohol and substance abuse counseling were also key. This need is considered from both the employer side of WtW and the staff perspective.<sup>25</sup> Finally, as in other program features, a high degree of responsiveness to the needs of clients is the hallmark of successful programs.

Other elements are important to the success of WtW programs, but because they are beyond the scope of CBWL's technical assistance role, I only mention them here. They include (1) sufficient resources to fund a quality program, hire qualified, skilled staff, keep caseloads low, and provide the supports necessary to WtW participants, and (2) sound, cost-conscious management practices that track participant activity and program expenditures and respond quickly to management problems as they arise.<sup>26</sup>



Massachusetts Elements Overlooked and Addressed

Methodology

The Corporation for Business, Work, and Learning (CBWL) distributed to each Regional Employment Board (REB) a planning package that included instructions for preparing their year one Welfare to Work plans. In brief, REBs were asked to describe the following program elements in the narrative section of their plans: the target population, local program planning process, participant assessment process, anticipated activities and case management system, plan for coordination with existing services, strategy for employer involvement, support services, and program performance goals. As noted earlier, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) had not yet defined what would constitute a positive program outcome, a hazy area that was acknowledged in the instructions.

As administrator of the WtW funds, CBWL was responsible for reviewing the plans to ensure that they were in compliance with federal regulations. My purpose in reviewing the plans was to assess the degree to which the critical program features described above were considered. This information would give CBWL staff an early indication of likely program strengths and weaknesses, areas where technical assistance might be useful, and suggest possible evaluation strategies. To carry out the assessment, I amplified each key element with a set of specific features and characteristics, which appear in Table 1.

Table 1

Assessment of Specific Features and Characteristics of Massachusetts Work to Welfare Program Plans	
<i>Shift to Work-First Philosophy</i> Shift message is clear and consistent Flexible services to meet clients' needs Variety of services Career path consciousness	<i>Employer Involvement</i> Employer committed to hiring WtW employees Employer's role in local program planning Employer's role in post-placement services
<i>Case Management System</i> Case manager assigned at the outset Case management remains connected until completion Clear responsibility and authority	<i>Outcome Oriented</i> Performance goals articulated Activities and services geared toward outcomes
<i>Coordination of Services</i> Multiagency involvement Shared location Pooling resources Interagency teams	<i>Support Services</i> Primary services available Secondary services available Other services available

I scored each local plan according to the strength with which the characteristics were considered, adding comments and concerns as necessary. Each characteristic received a score of 5 if it was given strong consideration, 3 if the consideration was adequate, 1 if it was given only weak consideration, and 0 if the characteristic wasn't considered at all. If each of the twenty characteristics in a plan received a perfect score of 5, its total score would be 100. This system enabled me to review each plan independently in addition to the group as a whole.

## Findings

Overall, the local plans fell far short of the level of detail and development for which we had hoped. Several plans offered very little narrative; two REBs that work closely together submitted identical plans. Because of our working relationships with the REBs, we knew that one of them had progressed much further in its planning process than its narrative expressed, others were not quite as far along as they suggested, and still others had obviously made minimal progress in defining their plans. Although I relied only on what was included in the plans' narratives when scoring them, it was clear that they did not always fully represent a REB's complete program design.

Having worked with REB staff on several committees developing WtW policy for Massachusetts, I believe that three significant reasons explain the disappointing provisions in the plans. First, many REBs were skeptical about the work-first philosophy and reluctant to engage fully in the WtW program, even though they were aware of the time limits that face many of their residents. Second, REBs, with little experience of the work-first approach, did not take into account the importance of these program features. Third, the REBs' high degree of control over program design made CBWL's role largely irrelevant regarding this exercise. There was little impetus to communicate more to CBWL than was sufficient to assure reviewers that a REB was in compliance with the regulations.

Given these caveats, clear trends were evident in the plans, and several major concerns arose.

1. *In general, the narratives portend lackluster programs.* Support services, the program feature that received the strongest consideration across REBs, obtained an average score of only 66, while the scores of the top five plans ranged from 79 to 64, hardly a strong showing. Similarly, the five weakest plans had alarmingly low scores ranging from 31 to 37, a real cause for concern regarding the quality of service that customers of these REBs may receive.

2. *The evidence of employer involvement and commitment is minimal.* Some REBs had included local employers in their planning, referred to them as important customers of the WtW program, and considered how they would be involved in post-placement services. Still, only one REB had really sought out and depended on local employers' input for their WtW planning efforts. This REB developed a unique, industry-focused approach to WtW and recruited businesses in four growing industries that rely on attracting low-skill, entry-level employees. These firms were deeply engaged in program planning early on and consistently. The REBs' entire WtW program centers on preparing participants for those specific industries with the skill sets, attitudes, and expectations that will be appropriate. Even so, there is still no evidence that those particular employers, or any others, have made a commitment to hiring and subsequently training WtW participants.

Because employers and participants are considered equally important customers, this lack of engagement suggests that both groups are likely to be poorly served. The difficulties in providing training and support services in the workplace have already been described. If program staff and employers don't address at least some of these issues in the planning phase, they will be even more difficult to resolve constructively when they arise on the job.

3. *Nine plans had very weak strategies for case management.* Many plans expected case managers to have an unrealistic blend of skills and experience, requiring them to function as mentor, trainer, advocate, job developer, and counselor.

Moreover, they were often left without the authority they will need to fulfill their varied responsibilities. Much of the success of participants in a WtW environment depends on the assistance of skilled case managers. As a result, their role must be well-conceived and their authority clear so that they can be effective advocates for their clients. Without an explicit and realistic definition of their responsibilities along with the authority to carry them out, they will be unable to meet the needs of their clients.

4. *More than half the plans had poorly defined strategies for coordinating services.* Of the nine with weak case management strategies, eight, plus two other plans, also had weak strategies for coordinating services. An agency cannot achieve success for its WtW clients and employers alone; at the very least, coordination with the Department of Transitional Assistance and the Division of Employment and Training is critical owing to the necessity of sharing client records. However, real success will be a factor of more than the minimal sharing of information on client status and eligibility. There is little indication that these REBs have developed the kind of rich working relationships with the agencies, educational institutions, and community-based organizations that can play an important role in moving participants from welfare to work. The likelihood of losing participants through the cracks because of poor communication is high.

5. *The plans indicated considerable awareness of the need for support services.* One REB, for example, showed great knowledge of its clients, which it expressed in the array of services it planned to make available to them. These services included backup child care, driver education, bus passes, transportation of dependents, payments for work-related tools and uniforms, income tax filing assistance, particularly the Earned Income Tax Credit, general equivalency diploma test fees, and materials for individuals with disabilities. Understanding participants' basic needs and making arrangements to provide for them will go a long way toward enabling individuals to succeed.

6. *One third of the REBs articulated specific program goals.* Five REBs were willing to express their own program and performance goals, even in light of DOL's lack of guidance. Because of their concentration on outcomes, these plans were more coherent and focused than the others. In fact, four of the five highest scoring plans had perfect scores in this category. Such strong consideration of outcomes is in stark contrast to several others that were patently unwilling to set any goals for themselves. In general, these programs appeared to be more of a patchwork of services and relationships than a coherent program and did, in fact, receive low scores throughout.

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## **Implications for Technical Assistance and Evaluation**

### ***Technical Assistance***

The generally unimpressive program plans clearly indicate that technical assistance will be useful in all areas, particularly regarding employer involvement and coordination of services. If assistance is to be successfully provided, the following criteria should be considered:

1. The time line for implementing programs is quite short; whatever assistance is provided must be on topics of immediate concern.



2. The information offered must be practical in nature so that program staff can quickly put it to use in their current work.
3. The need for knowledge of best practices is widespread and resources are scarce; assistance should be offered in ways that will reach the broadest audiences.
4. CBWL must be sensitive to the limitations of its role; it may *only* offer assistance, it cannot mandate program achievements.

Although it is prudent to address weaknesses in the WtW plans, it is also important to recognize the strengths that several Regional Employment Boards have shown in their designs. REBs are just as, if not more likely to learn from each other as they are to learn from models functioning under different conditions and in different economic and social climates. Developing ways in which program successes and lessons learned can be shared among the regions will go a long way toward raising the level of performance for all REBs. In addition, it may strengthen existing partnerships and open doors to developing new ones.

### ***Overall Evaluation***

It is worth attempting to tell two different stories as the Welfare to Work program unfolds. The first is clearly the effect that it will have on participants. Does WtW help them move toward economic self-sufficiency and ultimately economic well-being? If so, how and why? What benefits, if any, do employers gain from their involvement and at what cost? What components were most helpful and what made them so? How can we understand the lessons learned from WtW and apply them to other aspects of social welfare policy and workforce development policy?

The data that might supply some of the answers to these questions will be captured by the REBs throughout the course of the program. Only some of the questions will be addressed, however, and even those will not be answered thoroughly by figures. Finally, whether the data will be reviewed and analyzed on a systemwide basis remains to be seen. REBs may not have the opportunity to know how their performance compares with that of their colleagues, or more important, which expert REBs have valuable lessons to offer.

The second story grows out of the shift from federal and state control to local control over program policy and design. Here is a chance to learn how policy is built at the street level and about the relationship between local program policy and local program success. Are programs more effective when they are built by practitioners? What system supports, if any, can help practitioners in their role as program architects? How is the quality of services affected when program policy is shaped in the absence of guiding principles and purpose? What is the impact on customers when that void is filled from the local perspective, as some REBs have done, or remains unaddressed?

This kind of qualitative evaluation cannot be carried out by an organization that will be held accountable for the outcomes of the WtW Program. Practitioners would not relinquish their knowledge of how events transpired, why — what impacts were intended, and what impacts were achieved — to an organization with any amount of control over their resources. Only when both parties trust that they share the same purpose can they communicate authentically and to good effect.

Could the Corporation for Business, Work, and Learning's reduced authority be turned on its head, then, and become an asset? Could the lack of control and authority enable CBWL to become a partner to the REBs, observing and assisting rather

than posing a threat? Could the lack of power enable CBWL to work alongside the REBs and see WtW from their point of view, collecting and organizing stories to create a systemic picture of WtW in Massachusetts?

It would be naive, I suppose, to think so. As W. Norton Grubb reminds us, job training is a political product and WtW is political in the extreme, with only a two-year life span. The players in the Massachusetts workforce development system have had a long history, and they will continue far into the future, jockeying for control and resources long after WtW has been replaced by the next job training fashion statement. If we are to take advantage of the tremendous learning opportunity that the WtW program offers, I think that, unfortunately, we had best look elsewhere for instruction. ❀

*I thank Professor Hilda Kahne for her thoughtful and expert guidance, her encouragement, and her warmth. I also thank Suzi Teegarden, former president of the Corporation for Business, Work, and Learning, Barbara Baran, and June Sekera of CBWL. Finally, I am ever grateful to and for my husband and children.*

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# Welfare Reform

# Lessons from New England

Richard M. Francis

Thomas J. Anton

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*This article examines state welfare policy choices following the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. Using data from national studies and an intensive study of policymaking in New England, the authors demonstrate that states have acted independently rather than uniformly in response to devolution. Because states did not respond as predicted, and for reasons that were not anticipated, scholars must develop new approaches to understanding state policymaking. This study argues that accounting for state policy choices requires an understanding of the context of policymaking. Conventional analyses of welfare reform have ignored the institutional structures through which policy is formulated and thus miss the most important determinant of choices: the actions of administrative officials. The lesson of welfare reform in New England is clear: administration matters.*

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It is three years since President Bill Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act into Law. While it clearly is too early to attempt definitive conclusions about the significance of that action, it is also clear that the experiences of the past thirty-six months are beginning to reveal interesting patterns of behavior as states implement welfare reform. Those patterns are important not only because they reveal the scope and direction of state welfare policy but also because they challenge much of the conventional wisdom about the sources and quality of state government actions. In this study, we use the experiences of the six New England states to offer some preliminary observations about the content of state policymaking in reforming welfare. We also use these experiences to examine the conventional wisdom developed by social scientists to think about this most recent effort to reform American welfare policy. We argue that the way we think about welfare policymaking is as much in need of "reform" as the policy itself.

For those who may think that the experience of only six of the fifty states is too slender a reed for offering general conclusions of any kind, we suggest a different view, namely, that these states offer important analytic advantages for understanding emerging patterns of action. The first is diversity: New England includes large

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and small states, rich and poor states, urban and rural states, and states whose reform efforts will be shown to range from very restrictive to very liberal. Since our interest is in identifying potential patterns rather than established patterns, diversity among these six states is analytically useful. Second, for all its diversity, New England remains an identifiable region with permeable state borders that should shed some light on issues such as the extent to which state policymakers are constrained by the decisions made by other states. Finally, we make liberal use of results beginning to appear from studies with a national focus. Comparing observations of six states with data available from numerous other states enables us to offer insights enriched by both regional and national studies.

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### What New England States Are Doing

We begin with two obvious but often unappreciated points. The first is that the New England states have been pursuing welfare reform for many years. Enactment of national welfare reform in August 1996 did not initiate or force reform efforts in New England, it merely rearranged the structural incentives through which reform would be pursued. Even if we ignore the well-documented effort by Massachusetts to reform its welfare system in the 1980s, it remains true that Vermont initiated its reform in 1991 and that the other states in the region became active in the early 1990s as well.<sup>1</sup> Each state has had to accommodate its programs to the new national legislation, to be sure, but the federal-state relationship here is accommodation, not dictation.

The second point is that each of the six New England states has followed its own independent path in shaping new welfare policies. None of the states has attempted to impose some model solution on its citizens, and none has attempted to simply copy proposals adopted by its neighbors. Instead, each of the states has attempted to craft policies designed to deal with its own peculiar mix of problems and opportunities. This is not to say that New England state policymakers have ignored policies adopted in other states — far from it. But information from other states has been filtered through each state's traditions, culture, and institutional structure before being adopted, dropped, or modified. Put another way, each state has acted as a separate political entity, with independent authority, free to shape welfare policies to meet its own political and economic imperatives.

One way to appreciate the variety of choices made is to examine the content of state plans filed with the national government as a condition of receiving the new federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant. Based on information provided by the American Public Welfare Association in its September 1997 *State-by-State Welfare Reform Policy Decisions*, Table 1 provides a rank ordering of the fifty states according to the relative generosity of their reform policies. The ranking is based on thirteen common policy options found in state TANF plans.<sup>2</sup> For each policy, states were awarded one point if they chose the more generous option — for example, not having a TANF time limit shorter than sixty months — and penalized one point if they chose such more restrictive policy as denying TANF to legal noncitizens. All options were weighted equally to provide a composite score for each state that in principle could range from a high of plus 13 to a low of minus 13.

Table 1

## Ranking of State TANF Plans

State	Score	State	Score
Rhode Island	+ 11	Kansas	+ 3
Maine	+ 10	Indiana	+ 3
Colorado	+ 9	Arkansas	+ 3
Vermont	+ 8	North Carolina	+ 2
Utah	+ 8	Nebraska	+ 2
Texas	+ 7	Georgia	+ 2
Ohio	+ 7	Tennessee	+ 1
Oregon	+ 7	New Mexico	+ 1
Iowa	+ 7	Nevada	+ 1
South Carolina	+ 6	Mississippi	+ 1
Kentucky	+ 6	Minnesota	+ 1
Alaska	+ 6	Virginia	+ 1
West Virginia	+ 5	Connecticut	+ 1
Washington	+ 5	Alabama	+ 1
Oklahoma	+ 5	Wisconsin	0
Missouri	+ 5	Maryland	0
Hawaii	+ 5	Wyoming	- 1
Delaware	+ 5	Virginia	- 1
Arizona	+ 5	South Dakota	- 1
New Jersey	+ 4	Idaho	- 1
Pennsylvania	+ 3	Florida	- 1
New York	+ 3	North Dakota	- 2
New Hampshire	+ 3	California	- 2
Montana	+ 3	Illinois	- 3
Michigan	+ 3	Massachusetts	- 5

Source: American Public Welfare Association, *State-by-State Welfare Reform Policy Decisions*, September 1997, processed.

The range of policy choices revealed in Table 1 underscores the difficulty of generalizing about state welfare reform decisions. Some states have preserved generous policies, the majority have balanced liberal and restrictive provisions, and about one fifth of the states have chosen to adopt more restrictive eligibility requirements. Clearly, states have not followed any single pattern. Instead, as the American Public Welfare Association itself concludes, the "underlying theme that emerges . . . is that states are taking a wide variety of approaches . . . [and] the mix of assistance and services for [TANF] families is quite diverse."<sup>3</sup>

Nowhere is that diversity more pronounced than in New England. As Table 1 reveals, New England state welfare reform plans range from the most generous — Rhode Island — to the most restrictive — Massachusetts — policies in the country, affirming our earlier observation about the independence of state actions. Even among the remaining four states, there is considerable variation in the types of policies chosen. In only two issue areas, providing TANF to legal noncitizens and refusing to drug-test applicants, did all six states report taking the same action. Like the nation as a whole, the region includes states that represent the entire spectrum of possible policy choices: generous — Rhode Island, Maine, Vermont; moderate — New Hampshire; and restrictive — Connecticut and Massachusetts.

These outcomes demonstrate that states choose quite different policies, even in instances where they border one another. This point is particularly important in New England, where migration to one of many states is facilitated by their proximity.



Indeed, considering that generous Rhode Island is sandwiched between restrictive Massachusetts on the east and restrictive Connecticut on the west, the difference in scores for these neighboring states is instructive. Clearly, decision makers in each state formulated their own policy goals, regardless of what their neighbors were doing.

The sheer variety of policies adopted by states across the country as well as in New England is an important discovery, since it casts doubt on theories which suggest that states would race to undercut each other when setting benefits. The hypothesis that under devolution “all states will be engaged in a race for the bottom, each state trying to shift the cost of welfare to its neighbors” has not happened in New England.<sup>4</sup> This point is emphasized even more when the timing as well as the quality of state plans is considered. The order in which state reform plans were enacted was Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine, and Rhode Island. As Table 1 illustrates, these states scored +8, -5, +1, +3, +10, and +11, respectively, in the ranking, which indicates that there is no relationship between the date of submission of a state plan and the generosity of its provisions. To the extent that there is any pattern, it is one of increasing generosity over time. Maine and Rhode Island, the two most generous states in the country, submitted plans at least one month after other states had made their intentions known. The most telling example is Rhode Island, which adopted its policies a full two years after Massachusetts experimented with the waiver that would become its state plan.

The data shown in Table 1 make clear that variety, rather than some imagined race to the bottom, is the dominant characteristic of state policy choice. How can we explain such diverse policy outcomes?

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### **Explaining Variety: Do Existing Theories Work?**

Long before the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, studies had found substantial differences among state welfare policies.<sup>5</sup> Even under old AFDC guidelines, states retained limited authority to determine eligibility requirements and benefit levels. Scholars have used several variables to explain policy variation, including state fiscal condition, tax capacity, population demographics, partisanship, and legislative professionalism.<sup>6</sup> Though there are differences among these studies, the general principle is straightforward: increases in the values of these variables lead to increases in welfare generosity. For example, states with favorable economic conditions, higher tax capacities, and more wealthy populations are likely to have more liberal policies. If a state legislature has a higher percentage of Democrats and a greater degree of professionalism, its policies are likely to be more liberal.

Set against the New England cases, however, these political-economic determinants of policy prove to be poor predictors of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families provisions. For example, Massachusetts, with the region's best growth rate, a high tax capacity, high per capita income, Democratic control of the legislature, and high legislative professionalism, should have adopted a generous state plan. Other examples are less clear cut, but none of the fiscal or political variables typically used to explain state policies adequately accounts for the direction of welfare policies in the six states.

Consider the presumptive impact of economic conditions on policy. Data avail-

able for one-year growth rates beginning the first fiscal quarter of 1996 and ending the first fiscal quarter of 1997 provide a context for examining the impact of a state's economy on its welfare policy. This time frame encompasses the period before states negotiated plans through several months after implementation. We have combined data on employment, personal income, and population to develop an index that ranks the states according to the growth of their economies. In Table 2, the national growth rate is set at zero. Each state's index reflects its performance relative to the national average.

Massachusetts, which has the highest economic growth rate, has the most restrictive policy. Rhode Island and Vermont, both among the most fiscally challenged states, have adopted generous welfare programs. Despite having less economic momentum than New Hampshire, Maine has a far more generous plan. Other economic indicators bolster these findings. Connecticut and Massachusetts have the highest tax capacities in the region (see Table 3), but the most restrictive plans. Rhode Island and Maine have the lowest tax capacities but the most generous welfare plans.

*Table 2*

**Index of State Momentum, 1996–1997**

State	Percentage
Massachusetts	0.50
New Hampshire	0.39
<i>United States</i>	<i>0.00</i>
Maine	–0.10
Connecticut	–0.30
Rhode Island	–0.77
Vermont	–0.88

*Source:* State Policy Research, Inc., *State Policy Reports*, September 1997.

A similar relationship occurs between income levels and state policy choices. In 1996, Connecticut ranked first in the country in per capita income; Massachusetts ranked third. The three states with the most generous provisions, Rhode Island (18), Vermont (29), and Maine (36), all had per capita incomes at or below the national average.<sup>7</sup> Instead of adopting generous plans, high-income states were the most restrictive. Low-income states were far less willing to choose restrictive policies.

Standard political indicators do no better at explaining welfare policies in the

*Table 3*

**Tax Capacity, Percentage of National Average, 1994**

State	Percentage
Connecticut	135.7
New Hampshire	113.1
Massachusetts	112.5
<i>United States</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Vermont	95.0
Rhode Island	93.5
Maine	88.7

*Source:* State Policy Research, Inc., *State Policy Reports*, January 1998.

New England states. Partisanship, for example, provides little help. The partisan composition of the six state legislatures in 1996, when TANF plans were developed, is reported in Table 4 below. Rhode Island, with the highest percentage of Democrats, 83 percent, adopted the most liberal plan. Yet Massachusetts also had large Democratic majorities in both houses of its legislature. To complicate matters, both states had Republican governors. From a partisan perspective, both states were almost exactly alike.

Partisan explanations also fail to account for other states within the region. Although New Hampshire had the lowest percentage of Democratic legislators, its state plan was more generous than those produced in Massachusetts and Connecticut. The percentage of Republican legislators was higher in Maine and Vermont than in Connecticut when TANF plans were formulated, yet these states produced more generous plans.

Table 4

**Partisan Composition of State Legislatures, 1996**

State	Democrats	Republicans	Percentage of Democrats
Rhode Island	124	26	83
Massachusetts	151	43	78
Connecticut	110	77	59
Vermont	98	79	55
Maine	91	93	49
New Hampshire	116	300	39

Source: Council of State Governments, *The Book of the States: 1996-97*.

Since four of the six states had Republican governors when TANF plans were submitted, it is difficult to assess the impact of gubernatorial partisanship. Nevertheless it is important to remember that the first state to submit its waiver request, Vermont, was led by a Democratic governor. States that had Republican governors produced policies which ranged from generous to restrictive, independently of which party controlled the legislature. This is especially noteworthy in New Hampshire, the only state that did not have divided control. As one New Hampshire legislator noted, "Our plan is outstanding, given how conservative New Hampshire is supposed to be."

Finally, legislative professionalism is believed to have a positive impact on the generosity of state welfare policy.<sup>8</sup> But legislative politics in Maine, Vermont, and Rhode Island are not as highly professional as in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Even New Hampshire, with its highly amateur style of politics, produced a plan far more generous than those of most other states. Contrary to expectations, states with less professional politics produced more generous plans in the region.

### Why Explanations Fail: Models and Methods

The failure of conventional economic and political indicators to illuminate welfare reform in New England may reflect nothing more than the difficulty of attempting to derive general conclusions from a very small number of cases. In our view, however, there is another serious problem, which is the absence of intervening institutions in



popular explanations of policy outcomes. In using measurements of economic or political conditions to explain policy, the assumption seems to be that there is a direct relationship between the measured condition and policy. Public policies, in this conceptualization, reflect nothing more than the aggregate conditions measured by numerical indicators. Wealthy people have more money to spend, thus wealthy states are likely to have more generous welfare plans, and vice versa. If Democrats are liberal and Republicans conservative, legislatures dominated by Democrats will produce liberal plans and legislatures dominated by Republicans will produce restrictive plans. In this view, understanding policy is little more than an exercise in demographics.

This representation is something of a caricature, to be sure, but we believe it captures much of the popular thinking about welfare reform and helps to account for the popularity of the "race to the bottom" hypothesis. Those who have predicted such a race typically have believed that all states are dominated by business interests, which are uniform in their desire for less government spending and lower taxes; hence all states will be driven to lower their welfare benefits. So long as a uniform business interest is assumed rather than examined, and so long as the entities referred to as states remain equally unexamined, this model has an appealing logic. Business seeks the lowest-cost bottom line and, seeking to accommodate business interests, states respond by cutting benefits as they race to the bottom. In some unspecified and unanalyzed way, a uniform business interest is directly translated into state policy.

Yet if we know anything about public policymaking it is that public policy is more than the sum of pressures from some group or groups in a given jurisdiction. Peter Hall has persuasively argued that political pressures are mediated by "an organizational dynamic that imprints its own image on the outcomes . . . [and] institutions that aggregate the opinions of individual contributors into a set of policies . . . have their own effects on policy outputs."<sup>9</sup> It is precisely these institutions and organizational dynamics, of course, that are completely absent from analyses based on relationships between aggregate data and policy outcomes. To understand welfare reform in New England, therefore, we need to move beyond aggregate relationships to the institutions and dynamics that imprint their images on policy outcomes. We suggest that an examination of the development of welfare policy in the New England states reveals patterns waiting to be explained, patterns that are missed when treating policy as nothing more than the reflections of overall political forces. The assumptions of existing theories simply do not reflect the realities of the formulation and implementation of welfare policy in New England.

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### **Institutions and Dynamics**

For those concerned over the presumptive dominance of business interests in state policymaking, it will doubtless come as a surprise to learn that the voice of business has been largely absent from deliberations over welfare reform in New England. Administrative officials in all the states report that they have not been lobbied by business interests seeking to influence either welfare policy or its implementation. As a member of Vermont's Agency of Human Services notes, "We have not really been contacted by businesses . . . the business community has not applied much pressure." In Maine, members of that state's advisory group have argued that

"business groups are not at all involved with negotiations over Temporary Assistance to Needy Families." In New Hampshire, where business groups historically have been strong, the role of these groups has been minimal. According to a New Hampshire lobbyist, "Business groups are not important . . . Policymakers know they are there, but it's not clear how they fit in."

Even welfare advocates, themselves wary of business power, agree that economic groups have not been major players in the formulation of waivers and TANF plans. Advocacy groups in Connecticut and Massachusetts contrasted their own relative lack of access to the John G. Rowland and William F. Weld administrations with the close relationships business organizations appeared to have with officials of those governments. Nevertheless, both state officials and lobbyists noted that business groups did not seek to influence the process. According to one member of Connecticut's Department of Social Services, "Business was not very involved in negotiations." Welfare advocates in Massachusetts also agreed that, if anything, influence from business came in the form of more general pressure to keep the state fiscally strong.

Business did play a critical role in shaping welfare reform in Rhode Island, but it was not the role uninformed observers might have predicted. Early in 1995, the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC), a business-financed watchdog group, joined with the Campaign to Eliminate Childhood Poverty and other community groups to explore the options available for reforming welfare in Rhode Island. This early study group later became a coalition that developed its own plan for welfare reform that ultimately became the basis for both the new state law and the TANF plan. One of the major objectives of this coalition plan, however, was to prevent a 15 percent reduction in welfare benefits that was proposed by Republican Governor Lincoln Almond. Led by RIPEC, the coalition was successful in fending off the proposed reduction and, in agreement with Governor Almond, was also successful in expanding medical care and creating a new child care entitlement for the state's welfare population. Having played a major role in policymaking, however, RIPEC has since taken no part in ongoing efforts to implement the new legislation. As RIPEC's executive director said later, "Once we got the legislation passed, I didn't feel it was our place to be looking over their shoulders in the implementation process."

The general lack of business participation in shaping state welfare policy in New England, coupled with one business organization's support for higher rather than lower benefits, suggest the fallibility of untested assumptions about business behavior. Although business control over state welfare policies is often alleged, it remains unclear why business should even be interested in welfare. Business and welfare client populations seldom overlap by much, the amount of money spent on welfare is small relative to other items in state budgets, and other issues such as overall tax climate are far more salient than welfare to most business leaders. Even when business does become involved, the RIPEC example makes clear that business groups need not uniformly oppose liberal welfare provisions. Business groups differ in size, they differ in structure, they differ in purpose, and they differ in quality of leadership. Whether or not business is engaged, and to what ends, must therefore be a matter of investigation, not assumption.

In addition to the general absence of business participation in shaping state welfare policies, there is one other common element that has characterized reform pro-

cesses in the New England states: the leadership demonstrated by the governors and their senior welfare administrators. In each of the states except Rhode Island, it was the governors who initiated reform proposals and senior administrators who have been primarily responsible for implementation. Even in Rhode Island, where the governor's plan was in competition with an alternative plan that had been introduced earlier, many of the governor's proposals were incorporated in the compromise proposal that was eventually passed unanimously by the legislature. The governor had competition in Rhode Island, but he remained a major player and a major influence on the new legislation. It is also important to note that implementation of the new law has been entirely in the hands of the governor's senior staff in the Department of Human Services.

None of this should be taken to mean that state legislatures have been unimportant. On the contrary, on several occasions in several states, legislatures blocked welfare reform bills proposed by governors, forcing changes in them. On other occasions, as in Maine, the legislature approved a bill authorizing the Department of Health and Human Services to put together a waiver request. A small number of legislators in each state also have participated actively in groups that deliberated over policy choices and, later, in groups created to monitor implementation. On the whole, however, legislatures have been reactive, taking action largely in response to proposals put forward by governors. It is the governors who have led the way in offering proposals, thus defining the terms over which political debates would occur.

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## **The Significance of State Administration**

Perhaps the most important characteristic of welfare decision making in the New England states, however, is the comprehensive and powerful role played by state administrators. In each state, senior administrators helped to shape new welfare policies, and once new policies had been determined, they assumed principal responsibility for implementing those policies. Agency officials used their considerable discretion in turning policy into action in different ways, notably in the degree to which they provided access for welfare advocacy and community groups seeking to influence decisions. Where such access was provided, implementation decisions were more liberal; where it was not, decisions were more restrictive. This was always true, independent of the state's political or fiscal condition.

In the four states with the most generous policies, senior administrators acted imaginatively by creating Welfare Reform Advisory Groups (WRAGs) consisting primarily of pro-welfare organizations. These groups were organized in states with various political environments. States with Democratic, Republican, and Independent governors had advisory groups, as did states with divided and unified control in the legislature. In Vermont, Maine, and Rhode Island, administrative officials formed WRAGs prior to the formulation of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families plans and continue to meet with these groups over implementation issues. In New Hampshire, a WRAG was formally established later, after department officials had submitted the TANF plan, although informal meetings between officials and groups were quite common before this time. In Connecticut, the Department of Social Services employed a statewide council to solicit input, but officials did not convene a formal WRAG at any point. Unlike the other states, Massachusetts did not make any



arrangements for WRAGs and took the unprecedented step of suspending the forty-five-day comment period on TANF provisions.

Advocates in Rhode Island, Vermont, Maine, and New Hampshire all believe that officials have been receptive to their suggestions and that policies reflected their preferences. One member of Maine's WRAG commented that "there was a great deal of working between state [officials] and groups . . . The department saw great value in engaging groups." A member of Rhode Island's WRAG noted that the state had achieved "a good law, a fair law," but expressed concern that elected officials would undermine the terms of reform agreed upon by the Department of Human Services and advocate groups. One New Hampshire WRAG member voiced a similar preference for working with agencies and not elected officials, arguing that "we are far more comfortable dealing with [administrative] folks. State agencies are long-termers . . . As open as [deliberations] are now, more advocates are invited to the table." Another member of that group argued that the deliberations with the department were the most effective way to communicate preferences, since agency officials "are more friendly than legislators — some of these people have human service training." In fact, the bulk of New Hampshire's plan was actually written by the director of Health and Human Services, who is a former member of a prominent low-income advocacy group.

Administrative officials in these states similarly affirm the value of group input. As the director of the Rhode Island Department of Human Services remarked, "A lot of credence is given to advocacy groups . . . We listen a lot to what they have to say." A member of Vermont's Agency of Human Services agreed that "the contributions of advocacy groups have made a big difference in shaping welfare policy in this state," adding that the coordination of the WRAG with the agency "moved Vermont into a more supportive stance than if it had just gone with the terms of the federal plan."

In Massachusetts and Connecticut, on the other hand, agencies and advocates were largely adversaries rather than allies. Officials in these two states provided the fewest opportunities for welfare supporters to contest policy decisions, and bargaining opportunities did not exist as they did in the states that produced more generous provisions. Both Connecticut and Massachusetts officials typically relied on formal channels of influence such as legislative hearings to solicit information. Not surprisingly, advocates in these states were frustrated by the refusal of officials to work more closely with them to develop policy. One Connecticut lobbyist characterized the Department of Social Services as an adversary, adding that "the contributions of advocacy groups are not taken as significant." Even a senior official of the department admitted that pro-welfare groups "did not have ready access to the department." Massachusetts advocates were also concerned about their declining influence on state officials. One group leader said that, in contrast to previous administrations, "members of state agencies are now unfriendly . . . The types of people in charge now are not public service types." These kinds of comments, typical in Massachusetts and Connecticut, were a far cry from the relatively warm characterizations of administrative officials expressed by advocates in the other New England states.

Whether they supported liberal or restrictive welfare policies, then, administrators in the New England states were critical actors in defining state policies and in deciding how to implement them. This should not be surprising, given the literature on public bureaucracies, which has repeatedly shown that administrators typically formulate plans, mobilize constituencies, provide access to favored groups, and

advocate for policies that can benefit them and the populations they serve.<sup>10</sup> What is surprising is the relative lack of attention paid to the role of state administrators in the many speculative discussions about the consequences of welfare devolution. Focusing attention on administrative actions allows us not only to develop a better understanding of the sources of policy variety but also to observe emerging patterns of policymaking that may have lasting significance.

Consider, for example, the Rhode Island WRAG, probably the most innovative and most fully developed of the New England advisory groups. Technically called the Implementation Subcommittee of the Task Force on Federal Legislation of the state Children's Cabinet, this group was initiated by Christine Ferguson, director of the Department of Human Services, at the request of several community groups. Membership is essentially open-ended and includes any community group, advocacy group, and service provider organization that chooses to attend, as well as senior administrators from the department and any other interested parties, such as lobbyists or former legislators. The open-ended nature of membership means that the semiweekly meetings can be very large, sometimes attended by more than seventy persons, depending on the topics under discussion. It is difficult to imagine a more effective vehicle for generating the broadest possible range of opinions from community organizations, including those which had successfully opposed the reform plan developed by the department and put forward by the governor.

In a memorandum creating the subcommittee, the Department of Human Services (DHS) gives it extraordinarily broad responsibilities: "The committee . . . can serve as a community sounding board and planning body to assist DHS as it implements the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Act (PRA) and the state Family Independence Act. *It would also address broader children and family issues.* As needed, smaller work groups would break off to do more intensive, time-sensitive work on specific issues" (italics added). The subcommittee began meeting in the fall of 1996 and has been meeting every other week for two hours ever since. DHS senior staff attend every meeting and provide information and staff assistance to the subcommittee and the several task forces it has created to address separate issues. In keeping with its mandate, the subcommittee has addressed a broad range of issues from intake procedures and client assessment to substance abuse and domestic violence. It has also prepared a detailed set of recommendations following its review of the new program design being implemented by DHS. Most recently it has been reviewing the plan developed by the Department of Labor and Training, in conjunction with DHS, to administer the new Welfare to Work funds.

As this brief review suggests, Rhode Island's new Implementation Subcommittee has become a forum for an ongoing public dialogue between DHS and the state's welfare community over many policy issues, large and small. After three years of meetings, regular participants are on a first-name basis, a degree of trust has replaced mutual suspicion, and both DHS and subcommittee members agree that the subcommittee's work has been helpful in shaping policy. The subcommittee is neither an administrative arm of DHS nor a coalition of community groups but a little of both. Fundamentally it is a forum in which community representatives are brought directly into the decision-making process and senior DHS administrators get immediate feedback, positive and negative, about their decisions, even as they are making them. Although administrators sometimes are uncomfortable with the immediacy of criticism, and while group representatives sometimes feel uneasy over straddling the

line between influence and co-option, both sides continue to work energetically on the complexities of reforming welfare. For the moment this new instrumentality appears to be working. Whether it will ultimately be abandoned as a failed experiment or modified or made permanent remains to be seen.

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## Conclusions

Welfare reform in New England has confounded those who have based their expectations on unexamined assumptions about the structure and dynamics of federal-state relations. Within this region, at least, there is no evidence of any race to the bottom, with states competing against one another to achieve the lowest benefit levels. Business groups have not led such a race; indeed, business groups have had little or nothing to say about reforming welfare. Nor have governors or state legislatures engaged in such a race. Furthermore, neither gubernatorial proposals nor legislative responses have been based on the actions of neighboring states. Instead, states have crafted their own policies to deal with their own welfare problems, which accounts for the variety in those programs. The results are that three states have enacted reforms that rank among the most generous in the nation, another state has enacted reforms that are average in generosity, and two states have enacted less generous policies; Massachusetts, whose reforms are the most restrictive in the nation, is one of the two.

Conventional analysis that attempts to associate various indicators of political or economic conditions with policy is of little help in understanding these outcomes. Conventional analysis pays little attention to the institutional systems through which policies are developed and thus misses the most important source of welfare policies in New England: the actions of state administrators. Four states have relatively liberal policies because administrators in those states sought out members of community and advocacy groups, listened to them, crafted policies based on what they heard, and invited such groups to help implement the policies. Two states enacted relatively restrictive policies because administrators, following the lead of their governors, kept community and advocacy groups at arm's length and paid little attention to their recommendations. We cannot yet say whether the more liberal policies will work better than the more restrictive policies to move welfare recipients into jobs, but we can at least appreciate how those policies came into existence. Administration matters.

We note in closing that the New England experience challenges the analytically popular notion that welfare constituencies and the groups that represent them lack the ability to contest state policies effectively. In four New England states, after all, welfare advocacy groups were able to exert considerable influence, largely because of the actions of state officials. Institutional contexts, in short, determine the groups that will or will not succeed in being influential, and thus which policies are enacted. Because state capitals are often small in size, with large numbers of advocacy groups that have relatively easy access to both legislators and administrators, such groups may in fact have greater opportunities for influence in states than they have in Washington, where arguments are often drowned out by expensive media campaigns. As Howard Leichter has argued, "In the states, special interests must compete with various citizen groups . . . [This] represents an important strategic improvement over the role [low-income] groups now play in the national arena."<sup>11</sup>



Analyses that ignore state institutional settings, and the actions of administrators within such settings, will continue to miss much that is critical to our efforts to reform welfare. ❀

*We thank our fellow panelists at the 1998 Annual Meeting of the New England Political Science Association, as well as the A. Alfred Taubman Center for Public Policy and American Institutions, Brown University, and the Rhode Island Foundation for their support of this research.*

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## Notes

1. Robert D. Behn, *Leadership Counts: Lessons for Public Managers from the Massachusetts Welfare Training and Employment Program* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).
2. These criteria are Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) limit shorter than sixty months; provide TANF to legal noncitizens; deny TANF to drug felons; drug testing of TANF applicants; transitional child care longer than twelve months; transitional Medicaid longer than twelve months; family cap excluding additional benefits for other children; different treatment for families from other states; work requirements shorter than twenty-four months; community service after two months; allow individual development accounts; diversion assistance provided; and subsidized employment.
3. American Public Welfare Association, *State-by-State Welfare Reform Policy Decisions* (Washington, D.C.: Welfare Reform Information Center, 1997), 4.
4. Paul E. Peterson, *The Price of Federalism* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1995), 127.
5. Kim Hill, Jan E. Leighley, and Angela Hinton-Anderson, "Lower-Class Mobilization and Policy Linkage in the U.S. States," *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (1995): 75–86; Peterson, *The Price of Federalism*; Thomas R. Dye, *Competitive Federalism: Competition Among Governments* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath Publishing, 1990).
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7. State Policy Research, Inc., *State Policy Reports* 16 (January 1998): 12.
8. Peterson, *The Price of Federalism*.
9. Peter Hall, *Governing the Economy: The Politics of State Intervention in Britain and France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 19.
10. Michael J. Rich, *Federal Policy-Making and the Poor: National Goals, Local Choices and Distributional Outcomes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Phillip B. Heymann, *The Politics of Public Management* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Joel D. Aberbach, Robert D. Putnam, and Bert A. Rockman, *Bureaucrats and Politicians in Western Democracies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Aberbach, Robert D. Putnam, and Bert A. Rockman, *Bureaucrats and Politicians in Western Democracies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Thomas J. Anton, *Administered Politics: Elite Political Culture in Sweden* (Boston: Nijhoff Publishing, 1980).
11. Howard Leichter, "State Governments and Their Capacity for Health Reform," in *Health Policy, Federalism, and the American States*, edited by Robert F. Rich and William D. White (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1996), 170.



# Race, Class, and the Distribution of Radioactive Wastes in Massachusetts

Douglas L. Anderton

John Michael Oakes

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**Objective.** *Inequity in the distribution of environmental burdens among social groups, for example, minority and disadvantaged segments of the population, is an important topic in policy research. This research has largely focused on hazardous waste facilities and Superfund sites. Yet federal mandates to the states raise similar concerns over the social distribution of low-level radioactive waste facilities (LLRWs). This study seeks to provide the first evaluation of equity in the distribution of LLRWs within a state.*

**Methods.** *We use data from the 1990 Census to compare selected characteristics of tracts with low-level radioactive waste facilities to tracts without, tracts nearby LLRWs to those more distant, and tracts with LLRWs, which may be more, and less, undesirable to other tracts.*

**Results.** *Findings suggest that communities with LLRWs differ from other tracts in their residents' racial composition, socioeconomic status, industrial employment, and housing characteristics. LLRWs more likely to be viewed as undesirable are even more likely to be located in areas with fewer white and affluent populations.*

**Conclusions.** *Despite difficulties in assessing the relative risks and benefits of LLRWs, our results support concern for environmental justice issues in the future siting of LLRWs and in mandated state planning for low-level radioactive waste long-term storage.*

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A growing interest in environmental equity has spurred recent research on the siting of locally unwanted land uses such as landfills, industrial facilities, and Superfund sites. It is generally agreed that racial and ethnic minorities and the economically disadvantaged are likelier to suffer disproportionate environmental burdens than more affluent members of society. Significant policy directives, including Presidential Executive Order 12898, have dictated that greater attention and concern be paid to environmental justice. Empirical research regarding specific locally unwanted land uses and environmental equity, however, has led to disparate conclusions.<sup>1</sup> As policy demands grow rapidly in the area of environmental equity, so does

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the need for policy-oriented research and specific empirical assessments of environmental equity for other environmental industries and land uses. This study presents an analysis of environmental equity for one specific type of facility: low-level radioactive waste facilities (LLRWs).

Research on the relationship between the residential distribution of social groups and the location of environmental hazards related to industrial land use has increased dramatically since the United Church of Christ released a report alleging that commercial hazardous waste facilities and Superfund sites are more likely to be located in minority and lower-income communities.<sup>2</sup> But social scientists have long been interested in differences in living environments,<sup>3</sup> the location of industries,<sup>4</sup> the distribution of public goods and burdens,<sup>5</sup> the political economy of place or location,<sup>6</sup> and the distribution of pollutants.<sup>7</sup> More recent environmental equity research has examined the empirically demonstrable relationships between specific environmentally suspect land uses and the demographic characteristics of host communities. Most of this research has been limited to commercial hazardous waste facilities or Superfund sites.<sup>8</sup> While these land uses are important, there is a growing interest in, and policy need for, expanding the investigation to include other land uses that are either themselves environmentally suspect or required by new regulations to consider the issues of environmental equity.

Studies of specific types of facilities contribute to the general debate over the extent and practical remediation of environmental inequities. Such studies may also amplify or eliminate specific concerns, thereby aiding in the setting of realistic and responsible priorities. By identifying specific inequities, such studies may also suggest potential policy mechanisms or remedies ranging in scope from local zoning ordinances to national regulations or requirements. Specific land use studies are also necessary to provide comparative empirical data for use in the local assessment of equity now required in environmental impact statements.

This study addresses questions of environmental equity with respect to low-level radioactive waste facilities by comparing the characteristics of communities, more specifically census tracts, with and without LLRWs. The study is limited to LLRWs in Massachusetts. Results of the study may suggest whether environmental equity is, or should be, an issue in the siting of such facilities in the future and in the siting of more permanent storage facilities for the low-level radioactive wastes.

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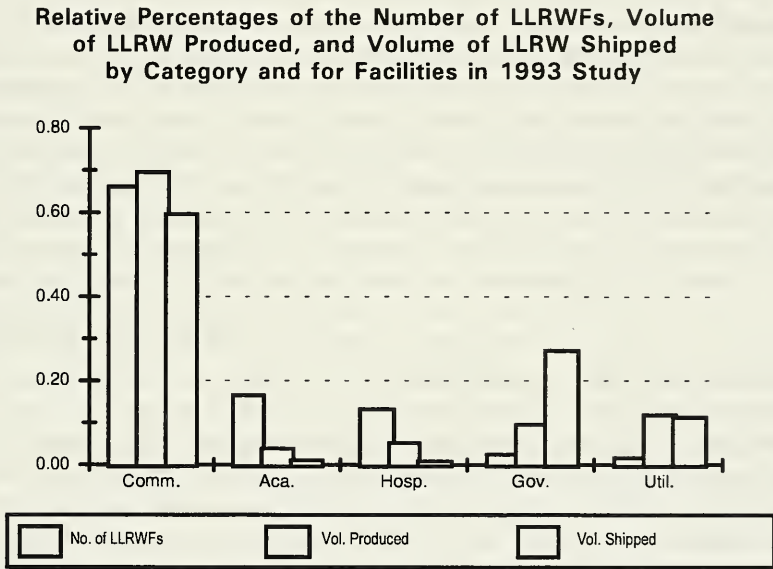
### **Low-Level Radioactive Waste in Massachusetts**

Low-level radioactive waste facilities are diverse. Those in Massachusetts are classified in five categories: academic, commercial, government, health, and utility.<sup>9</sup> Academic LLRWs generally use radioactive materials for research and training purposes. Commercial generators include biotechnology firms and other private companies that use radioactive materials in the research, development, and manufacture of goods and services. This category also includes environmental industries that either dispose of or decontaminate low-level radioactive waste generated by other sources. Local, state, and federal agencies that generate radioactive waste comprise the government generator category. Health and medical LLRWs use low-level radioactive materials in the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of disease. Utility companies generate low-level radioactive waste indirectly in the production of electricity by nuclear power plants and are the typical generators in the utility category. Many

LLRWFs may be viewed as beneficial to the communities in which they are sited. Yet specific facilities in each of these categories have been a locally unwanted land use or have been contested on the specific grounds of environmental justice.

Figure 1 presents the percentage distribution of LLRWFs, volume of waste produced, and volume of waste shipped by facility category for the LLRWFs in this study. The figure shows that of the 121 LLRWFs examined, about 66 percent are commercial. They produce about 70 percent of the 340,000 cubic foot low-level radioactive waste stream and about 60 percent of the 119,000 cubic foot stream shipped to other facilities for disposal. Although specific data on radioactivity — measured in curies — were not available, research suggests that commercial facilities generate and ship about 65 percent of the curies produced per year.<sup>10</sup> Despite their smaller numbers and volume of waste generated, utility LLRWFs produce the next largest proportion of curies, 32 percent. Consequently, commercial and utility LLRWFs are of particular interest.

Figure 1



In 1980, the federal Low-Level Radioactive Waste Policy Act required states to develop plans for radioactive waste management and disposal. The urgency of state-level planning increased significantly when one of the county's largest disposal sites, in Barnwell, South Carolina, was scheduled to be closed to future out-of-state wastes. The decision to limit such waste there was rescinded, and the site, along with others in Clive, Utah, and Hanford, Washington, still receives low-level radioactive waste from Massachusetts. Meanwhile, courts have maintained that the 1980 legislation continues to compel states to comply with the obligation to provide for disposal of waste generated within their borders.<sup>11</sup> In Massachusetts, the need for disposal facilities has also been heightened by the accumulation of low-level wastes from the state's two nuclear facilities, Yankee Rowe, now closed and nearly decommissioned, in Rowe, and Pilgrim in Plymouth.<sup>12</sup> However, prospective planning for

long-term LLRW storage facilities in Massachusetts and many other states is creating the familiar “not in my backyard” syndrome with growing concerns over equity in the distribution of existing and future sites.<sup>13</sup>

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### **Low-Level Radioactive Waste Facility Research Requirements**

Empirical assessment of environmental equity is difficult. Complexity stems from both the conceptual ambiguity in the term “equity” and the great methodological difficulties inherent in risk analyses.<sup>14</sup> These problems are most pronounced when the risks and benefits of facilities are more difficult to determine or presume. As a result, most attempts to assess environmental equity simply assess the sociodemographic distribution of “plausible” environmental burdens across communities. Under the dictum “do no harm,” it may appear reasonable to focus on plausible environmental burdens and neglect potential benefits. But researchers should not lose sight of the fact that benefits from many specific facilities may be appreciable and that greater harm might result from removing a facility from a community.

As more and more communities with low-level radioactive waste facilities become concerned about low-level radioactive waste in their neighborhoods, tension has developed between the economic benefits and opportunities that are created through the use of low-level radioactive materials and the risks such materials pose to public health and safety. For example, despite their arguable benefits, commercial decontamination facilities, utility-operated facilities, and similar industrial enterprises are likely to be seen as environmental burdens that should either be removed or for which the community should be compensated. At the same time, few would argue that a hospital using radioactive materials in the treatment of disease or a university research firm generating low-level radioactive waste should be moved out of an inner-city neighborhood. Such services are necessary and create a localized public good in terms of employment opportunities, health care for neighborhood residents, and broader social benefits.

Nonetheless, at the time of their siting, many of these facilities are viewed as undesirable land uses by the communities in which they are to be located. The cumulative wastes from many benign or beneficial LLRWs require some long-term disposal or storage facility, which in turn is seen by many residents as a huge environmental burden or harm. The empirical assessment of environmental equity cannot easily resolve these complex issues nor incorporate neutrally such ethical distinctions between good and bad LLRWs. Such differentiations are ultimately rooted in the relative value communities place on benefits and burdens of specific facilities and their ability to externalize burdens by relegating waste storage to other communities while expropriating facility benefits for their own community. Environmental equity policies have adopted the more neutral stance that all types of environmental burdens should receive attention if they are socially distributed in a biased fashion that is plausibly harmful to any specific social group or stratum.

Although hazardous waste facilities, Superfund sites, air pollution levels, lead pollution levels, and similar environmental burdens have been evaluated for environmental inequities, no similar study regarding low-level radioactive wastes has been published. LLRWs are, in most cases, less identifiable potential nuisances or threats than industrial facilities or sites. This may be because these sites are less clearly viewed as locally undesirable land uses. The broad standardized data avail-



able for other types of facilities, for example, the Toxic Release Inventory, Resource Conservation and Recovery Information System, and so forth, are not available nationwide for LLRWs.

The federal mandate to consider cumulative environmental burdens within communities that may be unfairly subjected to such burdens clearly extends to the question of whether LLRWs are distributed in a consistently inequitable fashion. New requirements to address environmental equity in the environmental impact statements filed for new LLRWs must include some empirical guidance or baseline data concerning the existing distribution of facilities. Of course, there is also interest in knowing the distribution of current facilities before planning a permanent storage or disposal facility. While our study is limited to Massachusetts, similar concerns are being expressed across the nation.

To initiate an environmental equity survey of LLRWs, our study describes the demographic characteristics of Massachusetts communities that house low-level radioactive waste generators and compares them to the demographic characteristics of Massachusetts communities that do not. These comparisons help to determine whether specific categories of Massachusetts residents live disproportionately in areas where low-level radioactive waste is generated, treated, contained, or stored. The result of these comparisons leads to a better understanding of what types of communities host low-level radioactive waste facilities and what kinds of individuals reside nearest to both the benefits and the risks that these sites bestow upon their neighbors. We hope that these results provide some preliminary guidance to further research, the preparation of environmental impact statements for LLRWs, and considerations of equity in deriving long-term solutions to the disposal or storage of low-level radioactive wastes.

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## Data Collection and Methods

We obtained the data in our study from the Massachusetts Low-Level Radioactive Waste Board in the form of a list of 125 low-level radioactive waste generators operating in the commonwealth in 1993, including facility addresses, telephone numbers, names of the facility radiation safety officers, and the type of facility. We dropped four facilities from our study because missing or out-of-state addresses could not be determined. We cover the remaining 121 facilities on the waste board list in our analysis.

We computer-matched, or geo-coded, facility addresses to their corresponding 1990 census tract number. In cases of ambiguous or missing addresses, we surveyed the facility to obtain the correct information.<sup>15</sup> The 121 facilities were located in 84 different Massachusetts census tracts. Of the 84 tracts with LLRWs, 80 percent had only one, 15 percent had two or three, and 5 percent had more than three facilities.<sup>16</sup>

We selected data from the 1990 decennial census of population and housing for each of the 1,331 census tracts in Massachusetts<sup>17</sup> and added information indicating the presence and number of LLRWs. We culled nine variables from this larger file to summarize the demographic characteristics of the tracts. The variables correspond to those used in similar studies of environmental equity.<sup>18</sup>

Six of the nine summary tract characteristics chosen for further analysis reflect hypotheses that environmental burdens are disproportionately placed in communities with higher proportions of minorities or disproportionately low-income popula-

tions. We selected percentage of white persons, percentage of black persons, and percentage of Hispanic persons of any origin and race to characterize their racial and ethnic composition. Similarly, we selected the percentage of families below the poverty line (for nonfarm families of four), percentage of households receiving public assistance in 1989, and percentage of adult males, age sixteen and over, employed in the civilian labor force to summarize the socioeconomic characteristics of the population.

Three additional variables reflect alternative hypotheses that environmental burdens are distributed primarily in areas of industrial activity, newly built neighborhoods, or affordable siting opportunities. To summarize the industrial and land-use characteristics of tracts, we obtained the percentage of those employed in industrial occupations (precision production, craft, repair, operator, fabricator, and laborer), the percentage of owner-occupied housing built before 1960, and the mean dollar value of the owner-occupied housing stock. The nine variables in this analysis provide demographic characteristics relevant to the study of environmental equity and allow for a direct comparison with prior studies.

We evaluated equity by comparing the characteristics of tracts with LLRWFs to tracts without LLRWFs. To reduce confounding influences (for example, the spurious correlation of minority residence and commercial enterprises owing to their being more likely in metropolitan areas) these comparisons are limited to those Massachusetts tracts which have no LLRWFs but lie within counties or census-defined metropolitan statistical areas that contain at least one LLRWF. This research design also ensures comparability with prior studies and, in all, only eighteen rural Massachusetts tracts were excluded from the comparisons.<sup>19</sup>

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## **Analysis**

To identify possible inequity in the distribution of low-level radioactive waste tracts containing one or more facility, we compared tracts without facilities, applying several different statistical tests. Table 1 presents the results of t-tests for the difference between the average characteristics of tracts with and without at least one low-level radioactive waste facility. However, some community characteristics analyzed have strongly skewed distributions, so we also computed an alternative test, a Wilcoxon Z statistic, for significant differences in the median community characteristics of tracts with and without LLRWFs. The two statistical tests address different plausible hypotheses of distributional inequity, each with its own strengths. The number of LLRWF tracts and other tracts varies according to the availability of data.<sup>20</sup>

Overall, LLRWF tracts are in areas with a significantly lower percentage of white residents and a significantly higher percentage of black residents than tracts without LLRWFs. These tracts also have a higher percentage of Hispanic residents, though the real difference between the means is less than 0.25 of a percentage point. Although the substantive difference in some community characteristics is not great, statistical significance does provide a preliminary indication of possible racial and ethnic residential inequities in the distribution of low-level radioactive wastes in Massachusetts. A comparison of families living below the poverty line shows that LLRWF tracts and other tracts do not differ significantly. In fact, tracts without LLRWFs have a significantly higher percentage of households receiving public

Table 1

Comparison of Communities with Low-Level Radioactive Waste Facility (LLRWF) to Communities without LLRWFs in Massachusetts Metropolitan Statistical Areas or Counties with at Least One LLRWF, 1990

Community Characteristic	Tract Mean		Cases		t-Test	Wilcoxon Z
	LLRWF	Other	LLRWF	Other		
Percentage White	83.74	88.21	84	1214	-1.88 <sup>a</sup>	-3.87 <sup>b</sup>
Percentage Black	7.33	5.97	84	1214	1.01	3.34 <sup>b</sup>
Percentage Hispanic	5.79	5.55	84	1214	0.28	2.94 <sup>b</sup>
Percentage Families below Poverty Line	11.63	11.48	83	1198	0.10	-1.43
Percentage Households Receiving Public Assistance	7.79	8.77	83	1201	-1.04	-1.92 <sup>a</sup>
Percentage Males Employed	92.56	91.63	83	1204	1.92 <sup>a</sup>	1.48
Percentage Industrial Employment	16.64	23.03	84	1205	-6.11 <sup>b</sup>	-5.46 <sup>b</sup>
Percentage Housing Built before 1960	57.24	61.76	83	1202	-1.79 <sup>a</sup>	-1.89 <sup>a</sup>
Mean Value of Housing Stock (1000 \$)	220.49	177.83	76	1171	3.81 <sup>b</sup>	4.93 <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>p < .10  
<sup>b</sup>p < .01



assistance. Tracts with LLRWFs have a lower percentage of employed males, but the difference between the means is slight. Overall, there is no substantial indication of socioeconomic inequities in the distribution of low-level radioactive wastes in the commonwealth. LLRWF tracts show significantly less industrial employment than non-LLRWF tracts. On average, LLRWFs tracts contain significantly newer housing than tracts without LLRWFs, and their housing stock is worth more than that of tracts without LLRWFs. That is, unlike most other hazardous waste facilities and sites studied, LLRWFs do not appear to be primarily located in industrial areas. This is significant in that many of the explanations for the location of hazardous waste facilities emphasize their location near the industrial market and infrastructure of metropolitan areas.

Although census tracts are a standard unit of analysis, it is also important to consider the wider area around the tracts with facilities. Prior equity research has indicated that neighboring areas may be substantially different from those which actually contain specific facilities. Table 2 compares those tracts nearest those with LLRWFs, that is, those whose centroid falls within two miles of the centroid of the nearest tract with an LLRWF, to other more distant tracts. The differences between the means of the "surrounding area" tracts and more distant tracts are statistically significant for all nine descriptive variables in the analysis. Surrounding area tracts have a lower percentage of white residents, a higher percentage of black residents, and a higher percentage of Hispanic residents. Unlike the data presented in Table 1, however, surrounding area tracts have significantly more families living below the poverty line than other tracts. The other variables are consistent with the results of Table 1; surrounding area tracts have more families on public assistance, fewer employed males, less industrial employment, newer housing, and a higher mean value of housing than other tracts. Overall, these surrounding areas do not appear as substantially different as the surrounding areas for commercial hazardous waste facilities.<sup>21</sup>

Some detail of residential distributions may be obscured by aggregation in defining a specific surrounding area. To provide greater detail, Figures 2, 3, and 4 provide graphs of the average of three central equity variables — percentage of black residents, percentage of Hispanic residents, percentage of impoverished families — by the distance, in miles, to the nearest LLRWF. For comparison, each graph also illustrates, across all tracts, the average of each characteristic, represented by a horizontal line.

Figure 2 shows that the average percentage of black residents rises from just over 7 percent in tracts with at least one LLRWF to approximately 12 percent for tracts within one mile of the centroid of LLRWF tracts. These percentages are higher than the average percentage of blacks by about 6.5 percent. At two miles out, the average falls to about 9 percent, then continues to fall almost monotonically until about twelve miles out. Figure 3 shows that the average percentage of Hispanics in communities with, or near, LLRWFs is much greater than one would normally expect, but again falls dramatically as the distance from an LLRWF increases. Figure 4 illustrates that the average percentage of families below the poverty line rises sharply in the neighborhoods closest to LLRWF communities but is erratically distributed about the overall mean, affirming the findings in Table 1 and indicating that the results of Table 2 may suffer somewhat from aggregation over the arbitrary definition of surrounding areas.

Table 2

Comparison of Communities within Two Miles of a Community with at Least One Low-Level Radioactive Waste Facility (LLRWF) to Communities without LLRWFs in Massachusetts Metropolitan Statistical Areas or Counties with at Least One LLRWF, 1990

Community Characteristic	Tract Mean		Cases		t-Test	Wilcoxon Z
	LLRWF	Other	LLRWF	Other		
Percentage White	79.63	91.52	393	905	-8.78 <sup>a</sup>	-12.66 <sup>a</sup>
Percentage Black	10.24	4.24	393	905	5.68 <sup>a</sup>	9.63 <sup>a</sup>
Percentage Hispanic	9.93	3.67	393	905	7.86 <sup>a</sup>	11.53 <sup>a</sup>
Percentage Families below Poverty Line	15.24	9.88	384	897	7.11 <sup>a</sup>	7.51 <sup>a</sup>
Percentage Households Receiving Public Assistance	11.05	7.71	386	898	5.60 <sup>a</sup>	4.53 <sup>a</sup>
Percentage Males Employed	90.83	92.06	389	898	-3.32 <sup>a</sup>	-2.05 <sup>a</sup>
Percentage Industrial Employment	20.67	23.45	389	900	-3.93 <sup>a</sup>	-5.21 <sup>a</sup>
Percentage Housing Built before 1960	72.95	56.54	386	899	13.88 <sup>a</sup>	12.54 <sup>a</sup>
Mean Value of Housing Stock (1000 \$)	195.50	174.13	368	879	3.94 <sup>a</sup>	2.40 <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>p < .01

<sup>b</sup>p < .05

Figure 2

Mean Percentage of Black Persons by Distance in Miles to Nearest LLRWF Tracts in Massachusetts, 1990

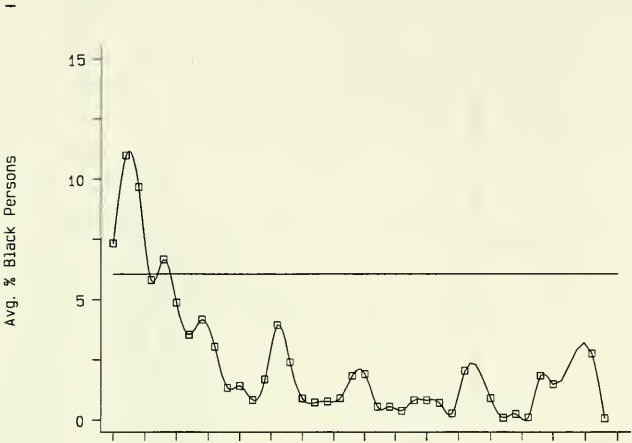


Figure 3

Mean Percentage of Hispanic Persons by Distance in Miles to Nearest LLRWF Tracts in Massachusetts, 1990

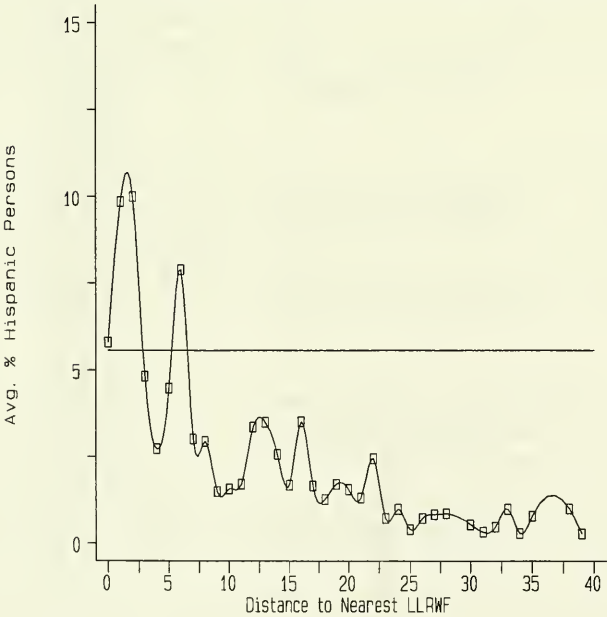
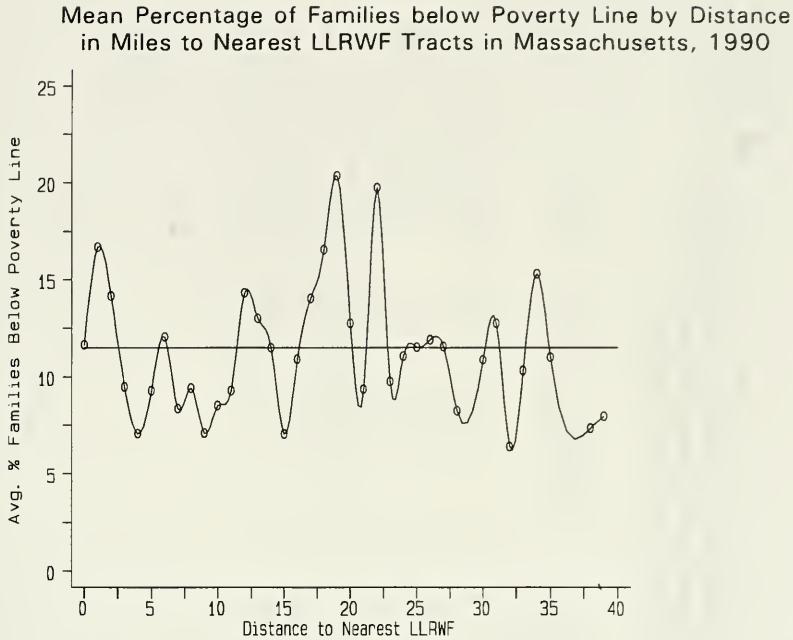




Figure 4



One limitation of these comparisons is that it is quite difficult to distinguish between locally undesirable, or potentially harmful, LLRWFs and those which may be viewed as either desirable or beneficial. However, it is possible to distinguish some categories of LLRWFs that may indicate their potential acceptance by communities. Table 3 compares a subset of fifty-eight tracts containing LLRWFs classified as academic, government, or hospital generators to all other tracts in the analysis (four of these tracts also contain corporate or utility generators). The fact that these facilities are largely small-scale LLRW generators and noncommercial might suggest that they are indicative of the least politically controversial, and perhaps most desirable, of the LLRWFs. The results of this analysis are mixed.

In academic, government, and hospital LLRWF tracts, the average percentages of white, black, and Hispanic residents are roughly equal to those in other tracts. Yet comparing median percentages, there are more black and Hispanics residents in these tracts. Fewer residents live below the poverty line or receive public assistance in this subset of facility tracts, using either differences in average or median community characteristics. Similarly, these LLRWF tracts have a greater percentage of employed males, a smaller percentage of persons employed in industrial occupations, and more new and greater-valued housing stock. In short, there is mixed evidence of racial/ethnic inequity, and academic, government, and hospital LLRWF tracts appear to be generally less prosperous and marginally less industrial than other neighborhoods.

Table 4 presents a comparison of the thirty tracts with commercial or utility generators to the other tracts in the analysis. Historically, these types of waste generators have drawn more scrutiny and less acceptance than the other LLRWF categories. Fewer white persons and more black and Hispanic persons live in tracts with at

Table 3

Comparison of Massachusetts Low-Level Radioactive Waste Facility (LLRWF) Communities Classified as Academic, Government, or Hospital Compared to Communities without LLRWFs in Massachusetts Metropolitan Statistical Areas or Counties with at Least One LLRWF Classified as Academic, Government, or Hospital

Community Characteristic	Tract Mean		Cases		t-Test	Wilcoxon Z
	LLRWF	Other	LLRWF	Other		
Percentage White	87.10	87.96	58	1240	-0.38	-2.10 <sup>a</sup>
Percentage Black	6.57	6.03	58	1240	0.36	1.94 <sup>b</sup>
Percentage Hispanic	5.29	5.58	58	1240	-0.28	1.65 <sup>b</sup>
Percentage Families below Poverty Line	9.43	11.58	58	1223	-1.51	-2.33 <sup>a</sup>
Percentage Households Receiving Public Assistance	7.17	8.78	58	1226	-1.69 <sup>b</sup>	-1.81 <sup>b</sup>
Percentage Males Employed	93.07	91.62	58	1229	2.83 <sup>c</sup>	2.17 <sup>a</sup>
Percentage Industrial Employment	18.07	22.83	58	1231	-3.74 <sup>c</sup>	-3.32 <sup>c</sup>
Percentage Housing Built before 1960	55.34	61.76	58	1227	-2.34 <sup>a</sup>	-2.45 <sup>a</sup>
Mean Value of Housing Stock (1000 \$)	221.97	178.52	55	1192	3.28 <sup>c</sup>	4.33 <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>p < .05

<sup>b</sup>p < .10

<sup>c</sup>p < .01

Table 4

Comparison of Massachusetts Low Level Radioactive Waste Facility (LLRWF) Communities Classified as Corporate or Utility Compared to Communities without LLRWFs in Massachusetts Metropolitan Statistical Areas or Counties with at Least One LLRWF Classified as Corporate or Utility

Community Characteristic	Tract Mean		Cases		t-Test	Wilcoxon Z
	LLRWF	Other	LLRWF	Other		
Percentage White	75.43	87.81	30	1138	-2.52 <sup>a</sup>	-4.22 <sup>b</sup>
Percentage Black	9.67	6.21	30	1138	1.44	3.76 <sup>b</sup>
Percentage Hispanic	7.29	5.79	30	1138	1.12	3.29 <sup>b</sup>
Percentage Families below Poverty Line	16.29	11.05	29	1124	1.65	1.15
Percentage Households Receiving Public Assistance	9.39	8.32	29	1127	0.55	-0.24
Percentage Males Employed	91.85	91.87	29	1130	-0.02	-0.42
Percentage Industrial Employment	12.79	21.68	30	1131	-6.23 <sup>b</sup>	-5.04 <sup>b</sup>
Percentage Housing Built before 1960	59.19	61.39	29	1128	-0.46	-0.33
Mean Value of Housing (1000 \$)	230.48	184.31	24	1096	1.89 <sup>c</sup>	2.25 <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>p < .05

<sup>b</sup>p < .01

<sup>c</sup>p < .10



least one commercial or utility LLRWF. A higher percentage of families live below the poverty line, and more households receive public assistance in these tracts; however these differences are not statistically significant. Almost equal percentages of male employment are found in areas with and without corporate and utility LLRWFs. However, the percentage of persons industrially employed is significantly lower in the commercial and utility LLRWF tracts. Fewer houses were built before 1960, indicating newer housing in these LLRWFs, but this result is not statistically significant. Housing in commercial and utility LLRWF tracts has a higher mean value than housing in other tracts. In short, neighborhoods with commercial or utility LLRWFs have higher percentages of minority residents and fewer residents who are industrially employed than other areas.

All these relationships examine each variable in isolated association with the presence of one or more LLRWFs. Many of these variables are, however, interrelated, and bivariate analyses may obscure important multivariate relationships. For example, it may be that when the percentage of male employment is controlled statistically, the percentage of families in poverty is no longer significantly related to the location of LLRWFs. These multivariate relationships are essential to understanding the character of environmental inequities.

To provide a multivariate analysis, we employed logistic regressions estimating how the odds of a tract containing one or more LLRWFs are related to community characteristics, net of other included characteristics. It was necessary to exclude some variables from the analysis because of problems of multicollinearity. The variables included are those which are statistically significant in one of the tables. The selection criteria based on the marginal significance of the variables is reasonable and coincidentally eliminates the problems of multicollinearity in the regression.

Table 5 presents the results of such a logistic regression with the presence of at least one LLRWF as the dependent variable. In this regression, the percentage of white residents is significant. LLRWFs are slightly less likely to be in neighborhoods with a higher percentage of whites. A tract with a 10 percent higher white population, for example, is only about 82 percent as likely to contain an LLRWF (that is,  $\exp[(10)(-0.020078)] = 0.82$  to 1). A tract with a higher percentage of housing built before 1960 is also less likely to contain an LLRWF, although the effect is less substantial. These results are consistent with those of Tables 1, 3, and 4 in the direction of significant effects. However, compared with the simple bivariate tests, industrial employment, value of housing, and the percentage receiving public assistance appear less significant. Most of these differences arise because these community characteristics are correlated with the percentage of white residents.

The evidence of inequity in the distribution of low-level radioactive wastes in Massachusetts appears to be primarily limited to a slightly lower likelihood of LLRWFs being located in neighborhoods with a higher percentage of whites. From earlier tabulations it might also be argued that LLRWFs, especially commercial- and utility-operated ones, are more likely to be found in Hispanic neighborhoods. In any case, without significant additional analyses it is difficult to associate risk or benefit with these facilities. However, a preliminary finding of inequitable distribution is, at the least, grounds for concern and attention in the siting, and related impact statements, of additional LLRWFs and in the commonwealth's planning for a more permanent storage or disposal facility.

Table 5

Logit Regression Predicting Communities with LLRWFs from Select Characteristics of Communities without LLRWFs in Massachusetts Statistical Areas or Counties with at Least One LLRWF

Community Characteristic	Coefficient
Percentage White Persons	-0.020078 <sup>a</sup>
Percentage Households Receiving Public Assistance.	-0.037310
Percentage Males Employed	0.014142
Percentage Industrial Employment	-0.026648
Percentage Housing Built before 1960	-0.009003 <sup>b</sup>
Mean Value of Housing Stock (1000 \$)	0.000003
Constant	-1.477346
Chi-square (8 df)	29.60
Probability > Chi-square	0.00
Total Observations	1,246
Total LLRWF Tracts	75

<sup>a</sup>p < .05

<sup>b</sup>p < .10

## Conclusions

The demand for, and scope of, environmental equity research has grown rapidly in recent years. This investigation is expanding to address a variety of locally unwanted land uses. In addition, under the impetus of recent governmental policy initiatives, the needs encountered in preparation of environmental impact statements, and a general research interest in cumulative environmental burdens, the range of environmental equity concerns to receive research attention will undoubtedly continue to increase. Yet most research and political concern has been directed at specific industries and facilities that process or store potentially hazardous wastes on site. We have attempted to expand the discussion of such sites to include facilities that generate, process, or store low-level radioactive wastes on site. It is particularly important to address this group of facilities at a time when many states are in the process of attempting to locate new long-term low-level radioactive waste storage sites. The setting of such a facility is imminent in Massachusetts, the state we have chosen to study, and a number of other states.

Concerns over inequity in the current distribution of LLRWFs should translate into the valid consideration of environmental equity in siting a longer-term storage facility. The establishment of such a facility is almost certain to be viewed as a locally undesirable land use by communities. The permanence of such a facility, the volume of wastes envisioned, stigmas concerning disposal facilities, and the high emotions attached to radioactive wastes in particular guarantee that the siting of such facilities will be politically charged. However, when one turns to existing LLRWFs, the lines are not so clearly drawn.

Many facilities studied as environmental equity research expands have positive as well as negative effects on their communities. In some cases the negative effects and nuisance factors are so overwhelming that the sites may be considered unambiguously undesirable by the community. In other cases, a community may either be

unaware of a potential environmental burden or judge the facility as desirable in light of enormous positive attributes. These are not easy issues. A seemingly undesirable landfill may be judged desirable, a facility to be sought after by a given community for the jobs and revenues it produces. Conversely, an apparently beneficial hospital or university may be judged locally unacceptable for its burden on community services and residential environs. Both these common instances illustrate the difficulties in reaching simple judgments concerning equity, which, in addition, may alter over time for a given facility. Nonetheless, the distribution of current LLRWFs is certain to be a valid concern in future siting of these facilities and more permanent storage sites.

Our findings for the commonwealth of Massachusetts suggest that black people and people of Hispanic origin are somewhat more likely to live in tracts with at least one LLRWF or in tracts nearby such facilities, for example, within two miles of the LLRWF tract centroid. This finding is especially surprising given the relatively small percentage of the Massachusetts population that is comprised of blacks and Hispanics. Statistical results are mixed concerning socioeconomically disadvantaged populations and insignificant in multivariate models controlling for other effects. Families who live near tracts with LLRWFs are more clearly socioeconomically disadvantaged — below the poverty level or receiving public assistance — than those who live in either LLRWF tracts or in tracts more than two miles away.

The industrial and employment characteristics that have explained the presence of some hazardous waste facilities in other studies do not account for the location of LLRWFs. Males in LLRWF tracts and nearby tracts are less likely to be employed, though the differences are small. The percentage of the population employed in industrial occupations is actually much lower in LLRWF tracts than in other tracts or not statistically significant in multivariate analyses. This finding is consistent with the unique nature of LLRWFs. They are often academic, corporate, government, and health-related institutions, not the industrial facilities or service companies commonly associated with hazardous and toxic waste. These findings also suggest that perhaps greater attention be paid in future research to the unique equity issues associated with facilities that are not likely to be linked with the industrial infrastructure of metropolitan areas. Many patterns of residence emerged in metropolitan areas of the United States over a long course of community development dominated by long-term land use impacts from industry, transportation, immigration, and other factors. These historical patterns of development and residence may underlie much of the inequity associated with industrial land uses. However, for more recent environmental hazards and those more loosely coupled to historically industrial areas, we may find much different patterns in the social distribution of environmental hazards.

Distinguishing various types of facilities may provide some additional indication of inequity in the distribution of LLRWFs. We might presume that facilities classified as academic, government, or hospital generators may be viewed in a somewhat more favorable light by communities than those identified as corporate and utility facilities, especially since this includes low-level storage at the state's nuclear power plants and private companies more clearly identifiable as handling radioactive wastes. This comparison reveals that academic, government, and hospital facilities are located in tracts that are characterized by a large percentage of white residents and small percentages of black and Hispanic residents, with fewer families below the poverty line and receiving public assistance than in other tracts. Corpo-



rate and utility generators are located in tracts with a lower percentage of white residents than other tracts, a higher percentage of black and Hispanic residents, more families living below the poverty line, and more households receiving public assistance than in other tracts. These findings provide some additional evidence that racial and ethnic minorities and the economically disadvantaged are living closer to low-level radioactive waste facilities that are likelier to be considered undesirable than the white and more affluent residents of the commonwealth. This research also suggests that efforts either to identify significant and real environmental risks, or to study facilities known to be unsuitable land uses at the time of siting, may reveal different patterns of inequity than studies including an undifferentiated group of enterprises that are plausibly harmful.

Proving environmental burdens are inequitable requires information about risks and benefits of specific facilities, which are at best difficult to obtain. However, our findings suggest that a degree of environmental inequity characterizes the overall distribution of LLRWs within Massachusetts regardless of their risks or benefits. Despite the fact that many of these differences are not substantively large, they are statistically significant biases of interest in a population with a relatively small percentage of minority residents in the first place. These findings strongly suggest that the imminent siting of more permanent low-level radioactive waste facilities must consider environmental equity among siting concerns. In finding some evidence of inequitable distributions of LLRWs in Massachusetts, our research also raises the need for further studies of such facilities and the need to extend this research to other regions of the country facing similar planning needs and concerns over environmental equity. Most facilities and land uses surveyed in recent environmental equity research are those of decades past. Environmental equity research on both LLRWs and the potential sites proposed for newly mandated long-term storage facilities offers the opportunity for prospective research and studies of import to the current planning and siting efforts. ❀

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## Notes

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# The MechTech Program

# An Education and Training Model for the Next Century

Robert Forrant, Ph.D.

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*The small-firm metalworking industry is routinely characterized by cutthroat competition and fierce privacy. Yet, since the late 1980s, the members of the western Massachusetts chapter of the National Tooling and Machining Association have participated in an education, training, and technology diffusion network characterized by a high degree of interfirm cooperation. Hundreds of workers and managers have take part in group training sessions and seminars. The reconstruction of the skill base is central to the MechTech apprenticeship program through which apprentices spend four years in participating firms, exiting the program as licensed machinists, tool and die makers, or moldmakers. In an important break with the typical short-term and firm-specific training approaches of American industry, apprentices rotate among several firms engaged in various aspects of metalworking to receive a comprehensive education. They also join a two-year college program and receive a degree in manufacturing technologies. The costs of the plan, including the college degree, are borne almost entirely by the participating firms. This article describes briefly the evolution of the entire western Massachusetts metalworking training program and in some detail how MechTech functions, concluding with a discussion of the program's implications for policymakers.*

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## Background

Since the late 1980s, member firms of the western Massachusetts chapter of the National Tooling and Machining Association (NTMA) have participated in an education, training, and technology diffusion network characterized by a high degree of interfirm cooperation. Several association members are also involved in the MechTech apprenticeship program, an important model for policymakers intent on building a skilled workforce in a variety of occupations. MechTech, a nonprofit corporation, operates a high-quality apprenticeship program to prepare what it terms master craftworkers for the machining industry of the future. In addition, high school pre-apprentices spend well-supervised time in participating machine shops during their second and third years in school to gain valuable hands-on instruction that provides clear links to their classroom education. Full-time apprentices spend four years in participating firms and exit the program as machinists, tool and die makers, or moldmakers.

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In a conspicuous departure from the short-term, narrow-focus, firm-specific training approaches in much of American industry, MechTech substituted a single-company approach for a program that involves a quarterly work rotation for apprentices among participating firms over a four-year period. High school pre-apprentices and full-time apprentices participate in a rigorous academic schedule that leads to their graduation from the program with an associate's degree in manufacturing technologies. The dynamic cross-firm collaboration has made it possible for small and medium-size shops to construct an apprenticeship program that approximates what was once the dominant and effective machinists' training model among large U.S. metal-working firms, for example, Pratt and Whitney, Brown and Sharpe, General Electric. It is a model cast off by large corporations in the 1960s and 1970s in the rush to jettison what they believed were non-production-related expenses.

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### **The Economic Development Link**

For several years, numerous government and business policymakers and social scientists have promoted "high performance" or "flexible" work systems as the key to restoring U.S. manufacturing competitiveness. Lagging productivity in the 1980s stimulated increased state and federal interest in and support for organizations that assist firms in productivity-related areas such as technology acquisition, new product development, marketing, defense production conversion, and education and training. For these policymakers, success in the international marketplace is predicated on production characterized by the agile and efficient use of technology coupled with organizational strategies to reduce hierarchy and encourage the involvement of front-line personnel in production-related decision making. From such a vantage point, global competitive advantage is dependent on three interrelated factors: how inputs, such as raw materials, are utilized; how quickly new products are designed and brought to the marketplace; and how well employee skills are enhanced and deployed. Therefore, substantial investments in human capital formation are a critical component for economic success.

Along with the heightened public attention currently being paid to education and training, there is a growing consensus in economic development literature that the clustering of firms may carry with it the potential to accelerate education, training, and learning in firms and across regions. For Stephen Appold, agglomerations offer "shared inputs, eased surveillance, and knowledge spillovers. Consequently, presence in an agglomeration is held to facilitate interfirm collaboration, thereby enhancing improved performance." A. J. Scott contends that "regional development is — and to an ever increasing degree — based on competitive advantages that are socially and politically created." For Eileen Applebaum and Rosemary Batt, what emerges from a theory of industrial districts is the notion that the potential exists for firms in a region to work together to foster comprehensive training systems "that have a strong local institutional base and that can evolve and respond flexibly to new demands on labor from changing technologies or products." This argument is borne out by recent events in western Massachusetts.

MechTech illustrates how interfirm collaborations, when supported by a public-sector training apparatus keen to listen to what industry wants, can resolve what appear to be intractable labor-market problems. How is it possible that the private

sector stepped up to play a leadership role in the delivery of high-quality training? Why is it that firms realized the competitive advantages that could accrue to a consistent investment in education and training? How does the metalworking training program coordinated by the NTMA chapter benefit the regional training infrastructure? Are the lessons of this model of industry-mediated training applicable to workforce development in other industries? These questions are answered through a detailed discussion of the MechTech program. The article concludes with an analysis of the lessons learned and a consideration of policy implications for education and training programs.

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## **The Western Massachusetts Metalworking Industry Redefines Itself**

### ***Background***

For most of the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century, western Massachusetts, with Springfield, its largest city, was a hub in a prosperous metalworking manufacturing region stretching up and down the Connecticut River Valley between Hartford, Connecticut, and White River Junction, Vermont. Firms along the river designed and built machine tools and components for virtually every other manufacturing sector in the nation. Machine tool firms built equipment for use in the manufacture of durable and nondurable goods, including automobiles, paper, textiles, and processed foods. Precision machine shops turned out the tooling, fixtures, and gages needed by machine tool builders to complete this equipment and to produce these components for industry. Taken together they comprise the metalworking industry.

In the 1970s and 1980s, a dramatic wave of layoffs and plant closings among western Massachusetts's largest metalworking manufacturers led to rapid industrial decline and massive dislocation for several thousand of the region's workers. Between 1969 and 1976 an average of 12 percent of the Massachusetts job base was lost annually owing to plant closings, with an additional 8 percent lost because of permanent layoffs. Overall, manufacturing employment in Massachusetts plummeted to slightly more than 600,000 in 1977 from 714,000 in 1967. As the rate of plant closings accelerated in the early 1980s, organized labor demanded action on the issue from then governor Michael Dukakis, whom it had supported and helped return to the State House in the November 1981 election. In response, Dukakis appointed a thirty-eight-member Commission on the Future of Mature Industries in the fall of 1982. The aim of the commission, composed of leaders from business, labor, government, and academia, was "to develop strategies for strengthening older industries and preserving jobs" and to "develop an industrial policy to move the state toward a truly balanced economy . . . in terms of its industrial mix and in its distribution of benefits to the Commonwealth's regions and citizens."

Ultimately, the commission endorsed voluntary standards of corporate behavior regarding notification that encouraged employers to give workers ninety days' notice of shutdowns. In addition, new programs established an institutional framework for industrial policy across the state. These included the Industrial Services Program (ISP), whose mandate was to work with firms to help them avoid closings, provide retraining if a closing occurred, and help communities affected by large numbers of plant closures; and a Reemployment Assistance Program to provide counseling,

training, job placement services, and an extra thirteen weeks of unemployment compensation to displaced workers. The program, with a \$14 million annual budget, was passed into law in July 1984.

One feature of this legislation was the establishment of what were termed the Cooperative Regional Industrial Laboratories under the direction of the Industrial Services Program. As part of this experimental economic development effort, the ISP allocated \$100,000 a year for three years to what became the western Massachusetts Machine Action Project (MAP). MAP's original intent was to assist in the orderly transition of the regional economy from metalworking toward service industries. However, research revealed that a large and complex network of small metalworking firms existed. Rather than shift displaced workers out of the industry, MAP determined that the program's goal should be to nurture the remaining small-firm economy composed of hundreds of small job shops that supplied tooling and parts to the machine tool, aerospace, defense, and electronics industries. Over the next six years, MAP acted as a catalyst between the region's metalworking firms, their industry association, local education and training providers, and state and federal agencies to provide industry-focused training and technical assistance to hundreds of managers and workers employed in the region's metalworking industry.

### ***Conventional Wisdom Takes a Back Seat***

In the aftermath of the shutdowns, a consensus that the western Massachusetts metalworking sector was decimated took shape among state and local public policymakers and economic developers. Yet today the region is home to a thriving and competitive collection of more than 350 small metalworking firms. These firms are mainly contract machine shops selling time on their machines to produce precision fixtures, tools, gages, subassemblies, and prototype components to aircraft, automotive, computer, and electronics manufacturers. Twenty percent of these firms are dues-paying members of the local chapter of the National Tooling and Machining Association (NTMA). Most NTMA shops employ fewer than a hundred people. For an industrial sector known for cutthroat competition, cost-driven business strategies, and fierce privacy, a nucleus of approximately seventy-five firms, most NTMA members, stand apart for their openness.

Shops routinely provide training to employees from other companies in shop-floor problem-solving techniques. A product development network of firms engaged in rapid prototyping is currently exploring commercial business applications with companies such as Pratt Whitney, General Electric, and Ford Motor Company. Hundreds of workers and managers have participated in group training and seminars over the last several years in topics including blueprint reading, computer numerical control machine tool programming and repair, work-flow management, and quality control.

Finally, a four-year program in which apprentices rotate among participating firms is in place to cultivate the next generation of skilled workers and managers. How did a region that only a decade ago symbolized the demise of traditional U.S. manufacturing give rise to such a dynamic industrial district?

Part of the explanation lies in a series of well-constructed social and political interventions that altered the downward industrial trajectory that many policymakers and development experts assumed was inevitable. These activities, first embodied in the state-supported Machine Action Project and today carried out



under the private-sector auspices of the local chapter of the National Tooling and Machining Association, were built upon existing social relations among firms that were able to stimulate and maintain a rich and continuous interfirm learning process. This, in turn, led to an enduring partnership among public officials and private actors who enabled industry leaders to directly shape economic development programs and services to satisfy their needs. New institutions, services, and forms of collaboration between and among firms and service providers emerged from this continuous process of engagement and adjustment between the public and private players.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Skills Shortage Hampers Growth***

It is ironic that after the steep business decline in the late 1970s and through much of the 1980s the most persistent inhibitor of metalworking expansion in Massachusetts today is the dearth of skilled machinists.<sup>12</sup> In the late 1980s, Machine Action Project staff were incredulous when they heard from small-firm owners that there was such a shortage. A survey and skills audit of firms revealed that the workers losing their jobs in the region were, at best, machine operators who lacked the blueprint reading and math skills required by the precision shops. In fact, workers in small firms were three times more likely to have machinery setup skills and could operate several different kinds of equipment. In other words, typical small-firm workers had more intellectual and hands-on depth and breadth of skill than their large-firm counterparts who were being laid off.<sup>13</sup>

With the average age of machinists across New England approaching sixty, this knowledge sparked genuine concern among many firm owners, who soon realized that without investments in long-term education and training the historically rich worker skill base, and with it the innovative capabilities of firms, would disappear. Therefore, NTMA shop owners willingly participated in the education and training projects started by MAP in the late 1980s. At the time the chapter ran a training school to turn out introductory-level machine operators and was searching for a way to provide additional services to its members. Soon technical high school machining programs in Chicopee and Westfield began to provide evening upgrading training for workers already employed in local machine shops. MAP obtained a grant to offer a course in the repair of Computer Numerical Control machine tools at Springfield Technical Community College. Industry representatives were instrumental in developing a suitable course of study. A monthly newsletter kept firms informed of upcoming courses and events. In 1991 a subset of firms established MechTech, modeling it after a program started in 1986 in Cranston, Rhode Island.<sup>14</sup>

The machinist shortage did not develop overnight, nor is there a shortcut to its amelioration. Yet the United States continues to spend very little of its federal \$6 billion education and training budget on rigorous, long-term training programs and less than one percent of U.S. workers participate in apprenticeship programs. Beyond manual skills, a machinist must possess a working knowledge of computers, geometry, algebra, trigonometry, blueprint reading, and manufacturing theory. It takes at least four years to educate and train a top-flight machinist capable of setting up and operating equipment, and it takes several years to gain great proficiency in the setup and operation of the myriad types of equipment utilized in the industry.

According to Raymond Gosselin, president of the Boston Tooling and Machining Association "We're faced with an aging workforce. We see the need to develop

training for new people.” John Moda of Adom Engineering in Haverhill has placed numerous help wanted advertisements in local papers to no avail. As a result, his small company started an in-house training program even though it was expensive and time-consuming. “Desperately Seeking Machinists” read the headline of a March 1997 article in the business section of the Springfield Sunday newspaper. “Machine shops are bidding against each other for what has become a rare commodity: skilled machinists.” The president of one local company told a reporter that his firm ran an advertisement for machinists for several weeks and received just two applications for the positions. John Hoops, director of the western Massachusetts NTMA chapter, observes that member firms are having trouble filling openings. For example, in late 1977, the nine firms on the chapter’s governing board together had more than sixty job openings that remained unfilled. This shortage exists elsewhere in the country as well. In Portland, Oregon, for example, firms that depend on skilled machinists are concerned that as “an aging experienced workforce heads toward retirement” there will be “an economic void in the metals industry.” A Portland-area vice president for human resources at a large manufacturer noted that over the next five to ten years companies there would be retiring approximately 50 percent of their skilled workers and that there is no one to take their place.<sup>15</sup>

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## **MechTech: Building a Skill Base for the Coming Century**

### ***From Public to Private Leadership***

When in late 1992 Machine Action Project staff learned that their state funding was to end, they worked with the National Tooling and Machine Association, the Bay State Skills Corporation, area technical high schools, and Springfield Technical Community College to keep the education and training initiatives going. Several academic studies noted the unique economic development approaches that MAP employed. MAP was highlighted by a number of influential academic researchers as a “best-practice” model of regional industrial and training policy. In MAP, analysts observed two particularly innovative features related to the localized nature of its strategy and activities. First, MAP’s strategy evolved from detailed analysis of the local industrial base and through local actors’ discussions of their own problems and needs. As noted above, the conventional wisdom was that the machining industry in western Massachusetts was decimated and that displaced workers had to be trained for new industries. By conducting industry-based research and tapping local knowledge, however, an alternate course of action emerged, a course that central state planners could not have designed on their own. Action-oriented research, as Joan Fitzgerald and Allan McGregor point out, became a key feature of MAP, identifying “several niches of employment growth within declining sectors” and revealing numerous employment possibilities in the region’s small firms.

Second, by acting as a broker between firms, educational institutions, and state agencies, MAP translated the requirement for higher skilled workers into specific training courses. Observers of the program noted that this strategy represented a vast improvement over centralized job training programs as it compelled the local education and training infrastructure to be responsive to the genuine needs of industry. The MAP model, suggest Rosemary Batt and Paul Osterman, went well beyond “the simple provision of training funds or technical assistance to that of creating new forms of organization and cooperation within the private sector and

between public and private sector organizations.” By working in this fashion, MAP served as a focal point for regional economic development activities related to metalworking and helped to focus the attention of existing development agencies on the needs of local firms.<sup>16</sup>

In the spring of 1993 the group submitted a proposal to the MassJobs Council, then the state’s clearinghouse for the expenditure of workforce development funds. The proposal stated that “within the universe of employed workers the need exists for continuous and coordinated upgrading of skills to allow employees to utilize existing technology to remain competitive. New technologies have created the need for new skills not only for machinists, but for owners, middle managers, and supervisors as well.” It noted that existing education and training programs were not coordinated and thus created problems of continuity and accessibility for employers and workers. The proposal offered a way for the state to support an industry-led consortium intent on helping firms to develop proficient managers and front line workers.

State agencies grasped the efficacy of the argument and provided the group with \$300,000 for a two-year program. The Bay State Skills Corporation (BSSC) played an important role in coordinating the group’s activities. Firms defrayed 50 percent of the cost for hands-on training for their employees. The Industrial Services Program provided support for several cycles of a twenty-three-week, full-time training program, mainly for dislocated workers. BSSC procured a \$200,000 U.S. Department of Labor grant to help staff the program and support in-plant industrial modernization activities. The January 1995 newsletter announced an equally ambitious calendar of courses and seminars. The list includes Computer Numerical Control (CNC) Milling, Turning, Interpreting Engineering Drawings, Basic and Advanced CAD/CAM (computer-aided design/computer-aided manufacturing) using AutoCad and SmartCam, Basic and Advanced CNC Programming, Technical Math Levels I and II, Machine Shop Job Costing, Inventory Management, and ISO 9001/2. Finally, the project provided planning and oversight assistance to MechTech. The state and federal funds were used successfully to institutionalize the capacity of the NTMA to provide a broad range of education, training, technology diffusion, and marketing services to firms. The chapter’s school has upgraded its equipment, new classrooms have been built, a computer-aided design laboratory was opened, and enrollments are the highest they have been since the school opened in the early 1970s.

An important hypothesis underlying the NTMA program is that public training dollars are more effective if the content and delivery of the training are designed in collaboration with industry. A central goal of the program is to use the infusion of public funds to develop the industry association’s capacity to design and deliver services and stimulate demand for these services among firms throughout the region. Drawing on their own membership, the NTMA determines what types of training and technical assistance firms throughout the region require. It then works with educational institutions and consultants to develop appropriate services. Building from the MAP model, the NTMA now serves as the broker between firms, government agencies, educational institutions, and service providers.

### ***The MechTech Program Takes Shape***

MechTech began operating in Cranston, Rhode Island, and the southeastern region of Massachusetts in 1986. A nonprofit MechTech corporation was started in 1991 in western Massachusetts by six National Tooling and Machining Association shop



owners. It was envisioned as the main feeder providing firms with an ongoing source of seasoned, technologically updated personnel capable of assuming managerial and ownership positions in the industry. MechTech's machinist (8,000 hours) and tool and die maker and moldmaker (10,000 hours) programs meet state and federal apprenticeship guidelines, and MechTech became an approved sponsor of apprentices by the Division of Apprenticeship Training of the Massachusetts Department of Labor and Industries in 1995. While the commonwealth presently allocates very little of its education and training budget to apprenticeships — approximately \$300,000 of a \$105 million Labor and Workforce Development budget — industry leaders hope that the success of MechTech will change this. MechTech received a significant boost with the establishment of the metalworking consortium in 1993. For one year Jim Kubinski, the current director of MechTech, received some financial support from the state grants to the NTMA to expand MechTech. Today MechTech is supported entirely by industry.

The MechTech corporation is the employer of record for all apprentices. The total amount to be paid by firms to MechTech is calculated at an hourly rate. Firms pay approximately \$5.00 per hour more above the wages they pay their pre-apprentices and apprentices. This money is used to staff the program, test and select trainees, monitor trainee progress, purchase medical and dental insurance for participants, and reimburse college tuition. MechTech pays participants their wages and benefits, including medical and dental insurance, ten paid holidays, and one week of paid vacation. Periodic raises are built into the salary structure and over the four-year training cycle, average annual earnings reach approximately \$27,000. These full-time participants in the program start at \$8.00 an hour and after completion of each one thousand hours on the job, they receive an increment toward their apprenticeship and academic work of \$0.50 to \$0.60 an hour increase. There is also an articulated wage structure for high school pre-apprentices. Juniors receive \$7.25 an hour for full-time work during the summer between their senior year and \$7.75 as seniors on their cooperative education placement in a MechTech shop.

In 1996 the program expanded from western Massachusetts to include shops in the central and eastern parts of the state, where the demand for machinists is quite high. Recruitment has also occurred in Connecticut, where 14 apprentices and 7 firms are part of the program. With the expansion the number of participating firms reached 60 in 1999, up from 9 in 1991, and there are 50 registered full-time apprentices and 20 high school pre-apprentices. Active high schools in the pre-apprentice machining and pre-engineering programs include Blackstone Regional Vocational Technical, Chicopee Comprehensive, Somerville, Ludlow, Pathfinder Vocational-Technical, and Westfield Vocational-Technical. There are currently 60 registered full-time apprentices and 25 high school pre-apprentices.

A unique feature of the program, one that demonstrates the willingness of firms to work together, is the rotation process for hands-on training. Trainees proceed through several shops over the four-year period to gain broad knowledge on all aspects of the tooling and machining industry. Apprentices experience machine shops, tool and die firms, production companies working in large volumes, mold manufacturers, pattern makers, and firms with the latest in computer numerically controlled machine tools and computer-aided drafting technologies. Firms complete weekly written reviews of their apprentices including a day-by-day description of the types of work performed and an overall weekly grade for the student. The re-

views are shared with each apprentice before every rotation to a new company. The MechTech staff also maintains an apprentice competency profile in which all college grades are recorded. The profile includes an extensive competency checklist for the skills to be learned by apprentices that is shared with every employer. In turn, and in the spirit of continuous improvement, trainees evaluate the firm at the conclusion of each rotation. Firms are rated on the variety of learning that took place, the opportunity for individual performance, the general housekeeping and organization of the shop, and the quality of instruction they were provided.<sup>17</sup>

A mandatory college-level academic curriculum includes college English, technical report writing, mathematics, machine design, fluid mechanics, four levels of computer-aided design, two levels of computer-aided manufacturing, and physics. Apprentices earn either a terminal associate of Applied Science degree or they may transfer their credits into an accredited engineering program at a participating four-year college or university. MechTech reimburses students' college tuition and closely monitors their academic progress. Students who do not do well in school must leave the program. An industry-funded college scholarship program for the pre-engineering students is in place — the first \$1,000 scholarship was awarded in 1997 for a Holyoke High School student to attend the mechanical engineering program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

### ***School-to-Work Links***

In 1996, for the first time, high school students were recruited by MechTech to become registered pre-apprentices. They are provided with a well-supervised co-op placement in a machine shop, after-school employment, summer work, and if they remain in good academic standing they can enroll in college courses during their high school senior year with the costs reimbursed by MechTech. The high school program stands in bold relief to the often criticized schooling typically offered to students not bound for a baccalaureate degree. To be eligible for the program students must maintain a minimum grade point average of 2.5 and have at least 95 percent attendance at school. If they remain in good academic standing and master the technical requirements of the program, they are enrolled full time in MechTech upon high school graduation. They then are guaranteed a job, credited with 1,000 hours earned toward their formal apprenticeship, and will have the remainder of their college education paid for. Several high schools are working with MechTech to adopt an industry-developed set of curriculum standards that will become the baseline for evaluating the soundness of instruction in machining and pre-engineering at the schools.

Industry representatives sit on technical high school machining program advisory boards, donate their time to recruit students to the high school program, assume all the wage obligations for participants, and take great care to assure that students are placed in jobs that have a rich learning component. In its third year, high school recruitment cannot keep pace with the demand for students from participating firms. According to Dan Dyer of Truex, Inc., in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, the students are "ambitious, anxious to learn and work out well. The MechTech program is really good for students, good for us, good for the state." Tom Monaghan of Osley & Whitney in Westfield, Massachusetts, notes that "any person who goes through [MechTech] will probably never be without a job. . . . Because of the quality training they will find work in any part of the country." Susan Fath of Morgan Construction

Company in Worcester, Massachusetts, adds that “MechTech apprentices are the cream of the crop. They are goal oriented, motivated, and academically superior. Our whole company feels as if we have adopted them.”

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## **MechTech and the Benefits of Collaboration**

### ***Working Together***

Interviews with greater Springfield employers and workers suggest that local, industry-driven training programs like MechTech provide at least five distinct advantages over more traditional education and training initiatives.

*Screening of Trainees, Apprentices, and Training Providers.* An important aspect of participants’ satisfaction with the program relates to the screening function performed by the firms in charge of MechTech recruitment. Employers and workers respect the National Tooling and Machining Association and MechTech and are confident of their ability to design or identify relevant courses and seminars and select high-quality instructors, consultants, trainees, and apprentices.

*Development of Programs Desired by Industry.* State funding for the general metalworking training program and for MechTech was earmarked for programs demand driven through industry requests. Because knowledgeable industry leaders were involved with training providers in the design of courses taught at technical high schools and public and private training providers, the overall content of the training improved. In addition, the collaborative approach simplified decision making for state and federal funders. The NTMA chapter was recognized as the clearinghouse for metalworking education and training programs. With confidence in the initiative, firms agreed to provide a good deal of its overall financing, thus successfully leveraging public and private funds.

*Improvement of Technical and Vocational High Schools.* Industry leaders viewed MechTech as a vital resource for the education and training of all-around machinists at a time when a shortage of such workers posed a serious impediment to firm growth. There has been a substantial improvement of technical high school machining programs. For example, one school, having acquired the latest in computer-aided design technology and two machining centers, is offering evening upgrading courses to area firms. With the revenues derived from this training it continues to purchase new equipment. A second school started a program for students interested in engineering that allows them to work in a computer-aided design lab and spend time in the machine shop making what they design. The industry-school link has helped schools to increase enrollments in their machining programs. Chapter members serve on the Regional Employment Board, the chapter is involved in several school-to-work activities, and members are on the advisory boards of several area high school machine shop programs.

*New Forms of Collaboration Beyond Training.* Among the partners, MechTech has provided greater access to well-trained workers, and across the entire industry the total metalworking initiative has demonstrated how a focus on skill development



can enhance firm competitiveness. As an offshoot of the MechTech and other NTMA-related activities, various production consortia, including a product development group, have formed. Firm owners and employees are exposed to technical and organizational innovations in other companies. In cases where firms are not familiar with one another, common interest in issues such as quality documentation or rapid prototyping help owners transcend the fear of exchanging information. The apprenticeship approach, with its four-year time line, has also forced firms to realize that skill-related issues will not be resolved in the near term.

*Perpetuating the Skill Base.* MechTech provides firms with a viable way to enhance the skills of their present workforce and give something back to the trade. It offers a way to give students a meaningful, well-supervised work experience with a minimum of bureaucratic red tape and expense. Further, it prepares students for a well-paying trade and a post-secondary education. The combined college grade point average of MechTech apprentices at the start of 1998 was slightly over 3.0, demonstrating the valuable educational opportunities that MechTech provides to individuals generally discouraged from seeking to continue their education. One participant in the group of fourth-year apprentices has expressed an interest in working for a few years and then becoming a technical high school machine shop instructor. A second apprentice is already training other workers in computer programming, and a third has begun to offer basic instruction to a high school pre-apprentice.

A. J. Scott argues that regional development activity, and by extension a regional economy, can be improved by employing three strategies: timely provision of such services as technology, marketing, and training information to groups of firms; development of production consortia to boost aggregate regional productivity; and establishment of forums to encourage industries to think long term. The MechTech program is involved in each of these arenas, and with the larger metalworking training collaborative, fosters a forward-looking alternative to "smoke-stack chasing" development strategies.<sup>18</sup> The approach allowed the local education and training providers, especially the community colleges and technical high schools, to learn a good deal about the education and training needs of the industry. Armed with this knowledge, the institutions were able to convince school boards and institutional budgeteers to appropriate the funds necessary to acquiring the technology needed to provide appropriate technical instruction.

### ***The Policy Picture***

Over the past few years, several states and regions of the United States have adopted industry sector or cluster approaches to development. MechTech is, therefore, an important model for teaching firms to become engaged in shaping a training agenda and contributing to the economic development of a region. In Massachusetts, for example, cluster strategies are being developed or are under review for the plastics, biotechnology, software, and fiber optics industries. Recent case studies of the Delaware Valley Industrial Resource Center in Philadelphia and the Labor Management Council for Renewal in Michigan demonstrate that public-sector organizations can indeed facilitate positive organizational change by working with groups of small and medium-size firms, thus assisting in the long-term revitalization of once declining manufacturing regions. Such organizations have five defining characteristics.

First, the organizations have to be credible with employers if they are going to avail themselves of offered services and participate in various programs. Second, the organizations have to be connected, namely, to be linked to the range of training institutions, business and trade associations, and technical colleges and universities that exist in a particular locale. Third, the organizations have to be catalytic to making things happen. Fourth, the organizations have to employ collective strategies to bring groups of firms together to reach some scale of program delivery. One-on-one assistance, while certainly effective, cannot generate the program scale required to boost the performance of a critical mass of firms. Finally, the organizations need to be continuous. For firm owners to have confidence that help is there, they must believe that the helping organization has staying power. MechTech does indeed have these characteristics.<sup>19</sup>

What can be generalized from the western Massachusetts experience? It is evident that to sustain a vibrant economic development and training collaboration, representatives from the industry or industries to be affected, and the workers in those industries, must be located at center stage and assume real leadership, defining the types of services needed and the range of collaborative activities in which they are willing to engage. The existence of a highly skilled workforce, accompanied by a continuously evolving education and training infrastructure to make certain that the workforce remains skilled, is a critical component for sustainable economic development. To reemphasize, it is the groups with the most to gain, especially firms and interested education and training providers, that have the clearest sense of the kinds of services required to bolster industry, as opposed to distant and therefore disconnected state and federal policymakers. By sitting at the table as programs are developed, the stakeholders with the most to gain, and conversely the most to lose, have a fighting chance to design a worthwhile training system. However, as I have argued elsewhere, this approach is at variance with the more traditional U.S. manufacturing modernization model in which direct subsidies and individualized technical assistance are provided to firms. If firms are not active participants at the outset of public program formulations, these programs are unlikely to deliver intelligently the kinds of real services firms require or complete a transition to private-sector leadership.<sup>20</sup>

In a review of federal and state economic development strategies, Zenia Kotval discusses the key elements of various manufacturing network programs. These include the application of public resources to demand-driven strategies; the increased ability to leverage public and private resources; and the establishment of evaluation measures to determine whether a program is effective. J. Held points out in his study of cluster strategies in New York that the development of support within the private sector is critical to success in whatever programs are instituted. Firms in the Hudson Valley participated in several focus groups organized by economic development officials to establish a research agenda and subsequently shape follow-up programs.<sup>21</sup> In Toledo, Ohio, development officials acted like social mobilizers among small and medium-size firms. In the Delaware Valley of Pennsylvania, public agencies were able to dramatically improve the delivery of programs to firms by forming active partnerships with them.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, there have to be strong ties between the community, the training providers, the funders, and the industry or industries to be served.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Final Thoughts***

For policymakers and economic development officials, the weight of the evidence supports the importance of organizations like MechTech, but developing such vibrant organizations takes time. Therefore, it is incumbent on state funders to look well beyond the typical one-year fiscal cycle, as the various Massachusetts agencies did here. Mutual learning reinforced a strong sense of partnership and provided incentives for private and public actors to accommodate one another to meet common goals. Flexible public funding first enabled the Machine Action Project and then the NTMA to experiment with program development and delivery. MechTech grew out of this approach to economic development, an approach that takes time. Twelve years have passed since MAP called its very first meeting with industry leaders and public agencies to assess the health of the metalworking sector. The commitment to continuous improvement, at both the firm and the program administration level, has enabled participants to learn from their experiences and to move forward.

MechTech demonstrates that firms can interact with flexible public agencies to build a comprehensive training system. This holds out the opportunity for reaching economies of scale in the delivery of education and training services to firms in other industries. However, this approach remains at some variance with more traditional delivery models, and precious few school-to-work programs in the high schools of the state have taken the lessons of MechTech to heart by attempting to work with groups of firms to establish sector-wide programs. In general, training providers, with little firsthand knowledge of the regional economy in which they operate or the particular needs of the industries they ostensibly serve, continue to offer courses in these programs. As the disappearance of skilled machinists in a labor market desperately seeking them demonstrates, traditional approaches to skill formation are incapable of resolving the difficult education and training issues that face the nation. MechTech, scaled up by several degrees of magnitude and fostered in other occupational fields, can move us along the way to reproducing the nation's skill base.

MechTech's continued growth, and the sustainability of the more general training network, are a consequence of the fact that these activities were embedded in an iterative process among firms, funders, and education and training organizations. At no point did a state or federal funder attempt to dictate what ought to be done. As the firms started to define their goals and objectives, great care was taken by state and local development organizations to allow that process to unfold, albeit in its own halting way. From the outset, the Bay State Skills Corporation, the Industrial Services Program, and the Regional Employment Board determined that no one institution would dominate the delivery of education and training. Potential partners were asked to do what they could do best. Everyone was involved in the planning process when grants and other funds were sought. The dollars were spread among a host of competent providers. The imposition from afar of a predetermined timetable, structure, or set of goals would surely have disrupted the trusting relationships essential to the success of the entire effort.

There is still much to be learned about how to build effective public-private



collaborations. Understanding the MechTech case is indeed an important place to start. Policymakers, training providers, and program funders should carefully review the work of collaborations like MechTech and the larger regional training network of which it is part. MechTech supports an argument put forward by Kotval that "locally authored industrial policy is better able than national policy to speak to the more defined political and economic interests of a particular region or locale."<sup>22</sup> Further empirical research to determine whether and how other regions characterized by innovative firm behavior exhibit the kinds of collaborative practices exhibited by MechTech is needed. This will add to the growing stock of knowledge about how declining regions can revitalize themselves and inform policymakers and economic development practitioners intent on the promotion of community-based and firm-based economic development. ❀

## Notes

1. Robert Forrant and Erin Flynn, "Seizing Agglomeration's Potential: The Greater Springfield Massachusetts Metalworking Sector in Transition," *Regional Studies* 32 (1998): 209–222. A great deal of information for this article was gathered through a series of interviews with firm owners involved with the National Tooling and Machining Association (NTMA). I interviewed James Kubinski, the director of MechTech, and John Hoopes, the director of the western Massachusetts chapter of the NTMA, in late 1997 and early 1998.
2. Eileen Applebaum and Rosemary Batt, *The New American Workplace: Transforming Work Systems in the United States* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 1994); Rob Atkinson, *The New Wave in Economic Development: Industrial Services in the 1990s* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of Technology Assessment, 1993); Michael Best, *The New Competition: Institutions of Industrial Restructuring* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Erin Flynn and Robert Forrant, "The Manufacturing Modernization Process: Mediating Institutions and the Facilitation of Firm-Level Change," *Economic Development Quarterly* 11 (1997): 146–165; and Paul Osterman and Rosemary Batt, "Employer-centered Training for International Competitiveness: Lessons from State Programs," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 12 (1993): 456–477.
3. Richard Florida, "Regional Creative Destruction: Production, Organization, Globalization, and the Economic Transformation of the Midwest," *Economic Geography* 72 (1996): 315–335; Michael Indergaard, "Making Networks, Remaking the City," *Economic Development Quarterly* 10 (1996): 172–187; Greg Lichtenstein, *A Catalogue of U.S. Manufacturing Networks* (Gaithersburg, Md.: National Institute of Standards and Technology, 1992); Ann Markusen, "Sticky Places in Slippery Space: A Typology of Industrial Districts," *Economic Geography* 72 (1996): 293–313; and Philip Shapira, "Modernizing Small and Mid-sized Manufacturing Enterprises: U.S. and Japanese Approaches," in *Technological Infrastructure Policy: An International Perspective*, edited by M. Taubal, D. Foray, M. Justman, and E. Zuscovitch (Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Press, 1996).
4. Stephen Appold, "Agglomeration, Interorganizational Networks, and Competitive Performance in the U.S. Metalworking Sector," *Economic Geography* 71 (1995): 27–54.
5. A. J. Scott, "The Geographic Foundations of Industrial Performance," *Competition and Change* 1 (1995): 51–66.
6. Applebaum and Batt, *The New American Workplace*, 162.
7. Forrant and Flynn, "Seizing Agglomeration's Potential."
8. Judith Leff, "The Plant Closing Debate in Massachusetts," Harvard Business School Case Study 9-386-173. Three issues dominated debate within the commission: whether to have any required notification of layoffs or closing; what types of assistance should go to workers in closings; and what role, if any, government ought to play in economic development, particularly in distressed regions of the state. By the spring of 1983, the commission had not reached agreement on plant closing notification, and the Massachusetts legislature was polarized on the issue. Labor advocates pushed for harsh penalties for any firm exiting the state, while pro-business forces argued that legislation would hamper any attempts the

state might make to rebuild its sagging industrial base.

9. Ibid.
10. The Massachusetts Machine Action Project (MAP) was one of five Industry Action Projects (IAPs) established across the state through the Regional Labs program. Each project was designed to involve displaced workers in industry-specific economic development plans to revive their communities. IAPs were established in Greenfield, North Adams, Fall River–New Bedford, Springfield, and Worcester. In each case the IAPs were independent, non-profit, public/private partnerships that empowered local boards to design and implement strategies to strengthen local industry. A defining IAP characteristic was the recognition that labor had a large role to play in this process. The IAPs that achieved the greatest success were the MAP and the Needle Trades Action Project in the Fall River–New Bedford area. The entire program awaits a systematic evaluation.
11. Michael Best and Robert Forrant, "Community-based Careers and Economic Virtue: Arming, Disarming, and Rearming the Springfield, Western Massachusetts Metalworking Region," in *The Borderless Career*, edited by Michael B. Arthur and Denise Rousseau (London: Oxford University Press, 1996), and Charles Sabel, "Studied Trust: Building New Forms of Cooperation in a Volatile Economy," in *Industrial Districts and Local Economic Regeneration*, edited by Frank Pyke and Werner Sengenberger (Geneva: International Institute for Labour Studies, 1992).
12. Andrew McCloy, "Firms Report Shortage of Skilled Labor," *Boston Business Journal*, January 27, 1997.
13. Forrant and Flynn, "Seizing Agglomeration's Potential."
14. Ibid.
15. David Berry, "The Jobs and Workforce Initiative: Northeast Ohio Employers Plan for Workforce Development," *Economic Development Quarterly* 12 (1998): 41–53, and Kathy Brock, "Pedal to the Metal," *Business Journal—Portland*, June 6, 1997.
16. Rosemary Batt and Paul Osterman, *A National Policy for Workplace Training: Lessons from State and Local Experiments* (Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute, 1993), and Joan Fitzgerald and Allan McGregor, "Labor-Community Initiatives in Worker Training in the United States and the United Kingdom," *Economic Development Quarterly* 7 (1993): 172–182.
17. This is broken down into categories including safety, conventional lathe work, grinding, and tool and die work. Each of these categories contains several additional, more specific categories of work to be mastered. For example, the general tool and die classification includes such subjects as design problem solving, first piece inspection, die tryout, and gage making.
18. Forrant and Flynn, "Seizing Agglomeration's Potential," and James Jacobs, "Training the Workforce of the Future," *Technology Review* 92 (1989): 66–73, and Scott, "The Geographic Foundations of Industrial Performance."
19. Flynn and Forrant, "The Manufacturing Modernization Process."
20. Ibid.; Sebastiano Brusco, "Small Firms and the Provision of Real Services," in *Industrial Districts and Local Economic Regeneration*, edited by Frank Pyke and Werner Sengenberger (Geneva: International Institute for Labour Studies, 1992); and Mark Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness," *American Journal of Sociology* 91 (1985): 481–510.
21. J. Held, "Clusters as an Economic Development Tool: Beyond the Pitfalls," *Economic Development Quarterly* 10 (1996): 249–261, and Zenia Kotval, "Industrial Policy: Federal, State, and Local Response," *New England Journal of Public Policy* 13 (1998): 7–18.
22. Flynn and Forrant, "The Manufacturing Modernization Process," and Indergaard, "Making Networks, Remaking the City."
23. Edwin Meléndez and Bennett Harrison, "Matching the Disadvantaged to Job Opportunities: Structural Explanations for the Past Successes of the Center for Employment Training," *Economic Development Quarterly* 12 (1998): 3–11.
24. Kotval, "Industrial Policy," and Charles Sabel, "Bootstrapping Reform: Rebuilding Firms, the Welfare State, and Unions," *Politics and Society* 23 (1995): 5–48.





# The Sargent Governorship

## Leader and Legacy

Richard A. Hogarty

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*Following in the long line of succession of his predecessors, Francis W. Sargent served as the sixty-third governor of Massachusetts. A lifelong Republican, he was a man of character and sterling Yankee blue-blood lineage with the stature of a political independent. Grappling with a series of hot political issues and braving the passions and divisions spawned by the war in Vietnam, he was one of the ablest and most intriguing men ever to be governor. He worked hard at knowing his constituents and their concerns, but he did not always provide them with easy answers. Several new ideas were transformed into policy during his tenure as governor. Some of these adjustments required trial and error as well as the courage to face and learn from mistakes. This article reviews Sargent's political career in depth and evaluates his performance as chief executive.*

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History reminds us that nothing counterfeit has any staying power, an observation, incidentally, made by Cicero about 60 B.C. History teaches that character counts. Character above all.

— David McCullough, 1998

At the height of his power and popularity, Frank Sargent was the most visible and influential Republican in Massachusetts. A dynamic and visionary party leader, he served as governor during the turbulent and event-filled years from 1969 to 1975. A relatively liberal Republican in an overwhelmingly Democratic state, Sargent recognized the political world in which he lived, accepted it for what it was, and moved through it with a dash and verve rarely seen in American politics these days. He reached out for contact and, indeed, for confrontation. Adept at reading people and sorting out power relationships, he was astute at gauging public opinion and calculating electoral interests. Relying on his traditional base of Republican support, he crossed party lines and appealed to liberal Democrats and Independents, thereby expanding his statewide base. Sargent held the governorship twice, from 1969 to 1970, when he completed the remaining two years of the unexpired term of his predecessor, John Volpe, and again from 1971 to 1975, when he was elected to a full four-year term.

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Affectionately known by his nickname "Sarge," the Yankee reformer first ran for lieutenant governor in 1966 on the same ticket with Governor John Volpe, a Republican powerhouse who carried him into office. Plucked from virtual obscurity, Sargent adopted the catchy campaign slogan "Put Sarge in charge," which caught on with the public and became his rallying cry. Becoming lucky, he was thrust into the governor's office when President Richard Nixon tapped Volpe to become his secretary of transportation in Washington.

I undertake an analysis of Frank Sargent's style and strategy as a public person. What does Sargent's career tell us about the role of character and personality in executive politics and decision making? I also examine his leadership style and the impact he made on the office of governor. The last sections suggest reflectively the curiously mixed legacy Sargent left behind.

Evaluating the performance of a single governor is no simple undertaking. To begin with, the sources of power available to a governor are elusive and variable, and the interpretation of the data used to evaluate performance is in part subjective. Whether a governor will prevail in a dispute over policy, or even whether he will become significantly involved, is the result of a subtle combination of factors, not of a single determinant. A governor is first and foremost a politician whose career depends in large measure on the successful negotiation of bargains. When confronted with conflicting demands, he helps to maintain a viable society by the process of brokering mutual concessions. Political bargaining and compromise lie at the heart of the political process. The will to conquer and to make a difference also comes into play.

In terms of the historical development of the office, Frank Sargent undoubtedly benefited from the contributions of the sixty-two governors, an incredibly assorted lot, who had preceded him. Some were rogues and thieves; some the mere agents of business moguls and party bosses; some were amiable nonentities, adept at platitude and evasion, who served their terms and faded into deserved oblivion. Still others were men of ability and personal distinction who would compare favorably with any group of chiefs of state drawn from a comparable society that developed in three centuries from a collection of a few hundred hardy settlers to a metropolitan state of 6 million people.<sup>1</sup>

Both in style and strategy, Sargent represented a sharp break from his predecessors. Looking on the governorship as a unique position of responsibility, he saw himself as the chief problem solver. Politics for him was a game of risk. Like most elected officials, he kept his advocacy general, positioning himself to take credit for successes and to join the critics in the event of failure. Even this approach involved a modicum of risk that he would be blamed if things went wrong, but he realized it need not be fatal. His politics were hardly cautious. Where he differed most from his fellow governors was in choosing to lead rather than simply follow the dictates of the legislature. Dating back to colonial and revolutionary times, there had always been a strong tradition of legislative supremacy in Massachusetts. The Governor's Council, which had to approve almost everything a governor did, was purposely created as a political check on the executive.

For more than a century after the adoption of its 1780 Constitution, the legislature was for all practical purposes the state government. The governor's formal role in policymaking was very small, and his informal authority depended on his personality and his party strength. Although elected at large, the governor served in office

for a term of two years, subject to reelection. This short term limit seriously restricted his ability to get his programs enacted. A handful of governors attained considerable power during the first half of the twentieth century, but the legislature still remained dominant.<sup>2</sup> In marked contrast, Sargent was a prime example of a governor who both in crisis and in ordinary times broadened gubernatorial authority. When he cared intensely about a given issue, he reached out for the views of others and responded to ideas that would garner support from a coalition of interests. In so doing, he exerted the kind of policy leadership that had rarely been found in any of the previous administrations.

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### **An Altered Political and Cultural Landscape**

As a point of departure, it is important to acknowledge that Governor Sargent came to power in a tumultuous era, a time of great social upheaval in America. Numerous combustible elements were present, including high unemployment, rampant inflation, oil shortages, and recession. Assassinations, growing protests against the escalating war in Vietnam, civil rights demonstrations, urban riots, prison uprisings, racial violence over school busing, tenants rights, welfare rights, and countless other public discontents surfaced. Cities were beset with seemingly intractable problems. Slums, poverty, street crime, drug abuse, and gang wars were among the social ills that menaced the quality of urban life.

There was a general sense of alienation among minorities across the country. Many blacks and Latinos felt marginalized or left out of the political system. Politics for them was not the same as politics for other ethnic groups. The 1965 Voting Rights Act and the black power movement had produced some gains for black Americans, but the underlying racism continued. The spillover effects of the Vietnam War, which drained the nation's resources to fight the war against poverty at home, poisoned the domestic policy. Student protests and campus riots disrupted university life. Dissenting groups marched in the streets, took over public buildings, and shut down colleges in order to protest what they believed to be an unjust war in Southeast Asia and inequalities at home. These societal and economic forces combined to make the forging of gubernatorial policy a hard job.

A state constitutional amendment, adopted in 1964, had lengthened gubernatorial terms from two to four years, so Frank Sargent had twenty-two months to consolidate his position before facing the electorate. When he became governor in January 1969, at the age of fifty-four, he was viewed as a political lightweight. After all, he had been a Volpe loyalist or acolyte and was not considered a force in his own right. The transition was fairly smooth because he picked up where Volpe had left off, but he assumed office with few ideas in mind and without a clear public agenda. But as time went on, Sargent emerged as an independent chief executive who proved to be quite different from Volpe.

The tempo of gubernatorial initiative varies with the disposition of the incumbent, be he passive or active, positive or negative. Sargent was inclined to be active and positive, and the pace of the policy process increased accordingly. His intention from the outset was to make himself a highly visible governor, a symbol of energy and motion, accepting responsibility for a broad range of public issues, seeking to be innovative on the one hand and reactive on the other. Innovations were more likely to ensue when he had to deal with a crisis, for then he was more reactive than



engaged. He gravitated to the politics of innovation, although the circumstances were often less than auspicious.

For as long as he was in office, Sargent made the most of his political opportunity, but he had to deal with a legislature controlled by Democrats. This is where his ability to set aside partisanship and to work with partisans of a different persuasion came into play. By the time he finished his second term in 1975, he had achieved significant reforms in urban transportation, public housing, civil rights, environmental protection, mental health, gun control, special education, public welfare, juvenile and adult correctional systems, social services for children and the elderly, and consumer protection.

The Republicans had been the dominant party in Massachusetts ever since the end of the Civil War, but they were now declining in numerical strength. While they controlled the governorship from 1964 to 1974, the Democrats had controlled the legislature since 1958. The Republicans, no longer able to mount serious contests for the less visible statewide offices, were plunging ever deeper into minority party status. By the early 1970s, they were outnumbered in the legislature by almost a three to one margin. In fact, registered Democrats greatly outnumbered registered Republicans, and the number of Independents was on the rise. The Bay State was considered Kennedy territory.

Not surprisingly, the Massachusetts voters rejected President Richard Nixon when he ran for reelection in 1972, voting for U.S. Senator George McGovern of South Dakota, who accused Nixon of prolonging the unpopular war in Vietnam. A bastion of liberalism, Massachusetts could claim the distinction of being the only state to go for McGovern, a lesson not lost on its citizens. When the Watergate scandal broke in 1974, bumper stickers sent a subtle but sobering message to the rest of the nation: Don't Blame Me — I'm From Massachusetts.

Against the onslaughts of this volatile environment, Sargent grappled with the new realities of changing life in America and dealt in practical fashion with the pressing public issues of the day. Considering the hundreds of bills that he signed into law, three deserve special mention. One was the so-called anti-snob zoning law, which mandated low-income public housing in the suburbs, the first such legislation in the nation. The no-fault insurance bill eliminated unnecessary litigation and thereby reduced the high costs of automobile insurance, while the Shea bill challenged the legality of the Vietnam War. The last two pieces of legislation were sponsored by liberal Democrats Michael Dukakis and James Shea, respectively. The Shea bill, which put the state in prominent opposition to the war, was later declared unconstitutional by the courts. Sadly, Shea ended his life in suicide. Considered a rising star from his earliest days, Dukakis was an ambitious Brookline lawyer who had already set his sights on the governorship.

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### **Sargent — A New Kind of Republican**

Sargent was an amalgam of North Shore patrician and hardy Cape Cod fisherman. Having lived intermittently in both parts of the state, he was a purebred New England Yankee. His architectural education at MIT signaled a break from the traditional Harvard Law School career path. All of which meant that he not only had a technological capacity, but also used his technical knowledge for problem solving and identifying policy alternatives.

Sargent was neither your typical, dyed-in-the-wool, conservative Republican nor an ideologue, which gave him wide latitude in decision making.<sup>3</sup> Reared in the progressive Yankee reform tradition, he was in some ways a throwback to President Theodore Roosevelt. Like Roosevelt, Sargent, whose passion was the environment, was an ardent conservationist who sought to save the Massachusetts shoreline. He championed issues like clean air, clean water, and open space. He was an environmentalist before the term came into popular usage, and the celebration of Earth Day arrived before the term had entered the public consciousness. When most of Cape Cod was still relatively unspoiled, Sargent sounded the alarm about the impending danger to its pristine sand dunes and beaches, which were gradually being destroyed by the construction of new housing and large-scale commercial developments. To prevent such a calamity from happening, he spearheaded a crusade to establish what became the Cape Cod National Seashore. But more about that later.

If Sargent had a political hero, it was New York City's mayor, John Lindsay, who had successfully cast aside his traditional base of Republican support and built political alliances that depended heavily on liberal support. As political actors, Sargent and Lindsay were paired comfortably in ideology and outlook. Both were liberal Republicans who understood and exploited their position as popularly elected chief executives. Both exercised their executive powers forcefully and independently, acting as they thought conditions demanded and their conception of the office permitted. Eventually, Lindsay changed his party affiliation and became a Democrat; Sargent remained on the reservation but distanced himself from Richard Nixon as far as possible, a position that less than endeared him to right-wing conservatives, who increasingly dominated his party. Simply put, he possessed the intellect, mental toughness, and combativeness that were necessary to survive the nasty political wars at the State House. Secure in his convictions about how the world operated, he was willing to take risks and to push the boundaries of policy leadership. Nothing written about him disputes this interpretation.

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## **The Interplay of Personality and Politics**

The interplay of personality and politics had a lot to do with Sargent's success. Very much the pragmatist, he typically managed to intersperse his comments with good humor, which did a lot to soothe chaffed egos. While he delighted in taunting his political adversaries, he also offered them words of kindness and encouragement when life dealt its blows. Democrats, who watched him perform, concede that the wit and charm he used with a flourish did not come at the expense of his principles. As former Senate president Kevin Harrington recalls, "He was a physically and mentally tough guy. When he believed in something, nobody could argue him in or out of anything."<sup>4</sup> While Sarge frequently "went along to get along," he was no Puritan and had no difficulty compromising in order to cut deals. Nonetheless, he was determined to lean hard in directions that he believed to be right.

Sargent had a knack for sizing up a situation and turning it to his advantage. When adequately provoked or frustrated, he could get mad and swear like a trooper, but a self-deprecating wit reassured people that he did not take himself too seriously. He enjoyed the public limelight and the excitement of political life, but he was aware of its dark side. On one occasion he admitted, "When anyone asks me if

they should go into politics, I always say, 'Can your marriage stand it?' Politics is demanding, frustrating, and doesn't ever stop."<sup>5</sup>

More than one political rival referred to Sargent as the Marlboro man. Others referred to him as a tree hugger. In the words of John Powers, "He was the Yankee Republican poster boy (Norman Rockwell actually painted his portrait), spare and angular with sandy hair, a lantern jaw, and the 'S' whistling through his teeth, living out in horse country, growing his own vegetables, and spending not a nickel more than necessary."<sup>6</sup>

Given his looks and resonant voice, Sargent learned how to use these assets to his advantage, especially on television. He became adroit at using this medium to mobilize public opinion in support of his programs, even if at times it meant going over the head of the legislature to say what needed to be done. He fully exploited the public relations potential of the office. His messages to the legislature were consciously addressed to a wider public. In a 1974 interview Sargent commented, "As a governor, you're not a dictator. You have to be able to persuade the people. One of the problems is getting too far out in front of public opinion."<sup>7</sup> Whatever the inspiration, he had the ability to educate and the capacity to appear concerned with the problems of everyone while remaining calm and collected in the midst of a political whirlwind. In an era when the word *politician* was becoming increasingly associated with greed, corruption, and venality, he had a reputation for honesty, integrity, and independence.

In 1938, Sargent had married well — Jessie Fay, a Yankee of impeccable lineage. Like her husband, she enjoyed the outdoors and did more than her share of volunteer work in the community. Sargent was a Unitarian, his wife an Episcopalian. Jessie was a liberal Republican who campaigned for her husband and supported social issues dealing with day care centers, elderly affairs, mental retardation, low-income housing, and juvenile detention centers. She played a leading role in the Women's Political Caucus and co-chaired a state Commission on Citizen Participation. In her aptly titled book *The Governor's Wife*, Jessie defined her role.

As a Governor's wife, I am never in a position to raise a shrill voice. My efforts are often low-keyed and behind the scenes. I have to be aware of "bad press" and behaving in a manner not embarrassing to my husband or the administration . . . I strongly believe that a wife can be a tremendous campaign asset and the better she is known before the election the more help she can be. If she's been to a neighborhood before, made friends there, helped with local projects and shown concern for their local problems, the candidate's wife can be a major help for gaining endorsement of her husband's policies and candidacy.<sup>8</sup>

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### Glimpses of the Private Man

In his private life, Sargent was surrounded by close friends and a lifestyle that only those whose wealth was extraordinary could afford. Politically he may have championed the needs of the poor and disadvantaged, but socially he gravitated toward the rich and powerful. Both he and his wife were very private people, Jessie the more private of the two.<sup>9</sup> They had a private life as well as a public life. They were accessible yet inaccessible. That was part of their mystique.

In political parlance, Sargent had what is known as the common touch. Douglas



Foy, director of the Conservation Law Foundation, tells the story about Sarge's driving up to a toll booth on the Massachusetts Turnpike, quickly reading the toll collector's name tag, and striking up a friendly conversation with him. He, of course, had never met the man, but that was beside the point. While the toll collector represented a potential vote, the governor interacted with him both as a public and a private man.<sup>10</sup>

Another story is told about Sargent's befriending a young eleven-year-old boy while attending a World Series baseball game at Fenway Park in October 1967, the year of the "Impossible Dream," with the Boston Red Sox playing the Saint Louis Cardinals. The boy's father, who had purchased two separate tickets from a scalper, was unable to sit with his son, so he planted him in a box seat next to the lieutenant governor. Thirty-one years later, the youngster, by then a grown man, recounted what happened:

Sargent treated me as if I was the most important guy in the ballpark. It was as if we had gone to the game together. He asked me if I wanted a hot dog, popcorn, peanuts, whatever. I was keeping the box score, and as the game went on Sarge would lean over and say, "What'd he do his last time up?" or "How many has Lonborg struck out?" The box was swarming with visitors, of course, all looking to shake Sarge's hand or talk a little politics. I still remember that late in the game, Yaz got up and singled cleanly to right. Sarge stood up, applauded, and said, to no one in particular, "That's a damn good hit."<sup>11</sup>

Sargent described himself as being from the "fin, fur, and feather folks."<sup>12</sup> A hunting companion recalled an incident that took place in the predawn darkness. "We used to hunt together. I remember when he'd show up in the early morning, fire off his shotgun right beneath my bedroom window, and yell, "Get up, you lazy bum."<sup>13</sup> Subtlety was not his strong suit.

As a fisherman, Sargent became acquainted with all kinds of people in a world far removed from Beacon Hill. He told this shaggy dog tale about the owner of Thompson's Clam Bar and Wychmere Harbor Club on the Cape.

I got to know almost everybody on the waterfront. There was a guy who ran a place where you could sell your fish, and he used to drink like a son-of-a-bitch. One day he was stiff and he spotted me as he was going by our house. "Sarge, where the hell have you been?" he called out. "I've been in bed with sciatica," I told him. "Who's she?" he said. Well, Jessie was there and she died laughing.<sup>14</sup>

These episodes provide us with glimpses of the lesser-known Sargent who was seldom seen in public. His son Bill says that his father "loved doing things that kids loved to do. He was more like a grandfather to us."<sup>15</sup> It is essential to understand the personal element because it was such a vitally important aspect of his power.

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### **Sargent's Inner Circle and Decision-making Style**

While Sargent had a fairly clear sense of where he fit in the political spectrum, he had little patience with philosophic discussion and very limited curiosity about issues until they were actually thrust upon him. He craved being at the center of political action and enjoyed dealing with urgent and momentous choices. Sargent's single most important quality was his ability to make bold decisions. He liked to make decisions in a quasi-judicial mode, preferring to let things bubble up and choosing from

among alternatives developed and debated by his staff.<sup>16</sup>

As governor, Sargent operated on the principle of centralized management. He assembled a small staff and appointed the best people he could find to head the various executive departments and agencies. They were a mix of old and new faces largely picked by Sargent. The inner circle consisted of four men with whom he had worked closely prior to becoming governor: Donald Dwight, a mainstream moderate Republican; Albert Kramer, a liberal Democrat and former state representative who came from an urban working-class district in Chelsea; Robert Yasi, a former civil servant who understood the workings of the state bureaucracy; and Jack Flannery, a former newsman who worried about Sargent's political stakes and how he fared with the media. As the pressures of office descended upon them, these advisers struggled for the governor's mind, and they served him well. Dwight and Kramer remained the main policy advocates; Flannery served as a counterweight to Kramer. Steve Teichner and Tom Reardon, another newspaperman, joined this group somewhat later. Both Reardon and Flannery advanced the administration's position with editors and writers.

Alan Altshuler, an MIT academic who headed the governor's task force on highways and later became his secretary of transportation and construction, points out, "Sargent's personal inner circle had a high degree of continuity through his six years in office, and it remained dominant, even after the cabinet came into being, on matters that seemed to involve high personal stakes for the governor."<sup>17</sup> The governor sought to avoid becoming captured by the special interests and clientele groups that abound in public life. He trusted his staff to sort out the arguments put forward by outsiders and to craft his best alternatives. Sometimes his staff second-guessed his agency and department heads, which became a source of friction and internal squabbles.

Martha Weinberg's *Managing the State*, published in 1977, provides a detailed account of Sargent's relationship as governor with four specific state agencies. According to Weinberg, Sargent tried to exercise some degree of executive control over the Department of Public Works and the Department of Public Welfare, but he did not attempt to do so with the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency and the Department of Mental Health. These agencies are good examples of his willingness to intervene when he perceived there was a public or political crisis and to remain relatively unengaged in issues where these imperatives did not exist. Weinberg argues that Sargent remained both crisis-oriented and reactive throughout his tenure, responding to the flow of pressing issues and limiting himself to selecting from among options developed by others.<sup>18</sup>

Sargent embraced an active, involved role for government and accepted the reality of the welfare state. These were trends thoroughly consistent with the governor's temperament and philosophy. Most Republican politicians, by instinct and disposition, went the other way. Portrayed in the media as "a maverick governor of a maverick state," Sargent was a leader whose popular appeal transcended party lines.<sup>19</sup> The archetype of a new breed of crossover politician, he was shrewd enough to reach out to Democrats and Independents alike. Charles Kenney and Robert Turner, two veteran State House reporters who watched the Sargent battles at close range, described him in these terms, "Though a Republican, he was moderate to liberal on most issues, and he relished the give-and-take that were an essential part of relations with the Democratic legislature. Most important, the voters loved him."<sup>20</sup>

In 1970, Sargent the incumbent easily won his party's nomination for governor. He picked Donald Dwight as his running mate. In the general election, he ran against Democrat Kevin White, the mayor of Boston. Campaigning throughout the state, Sargent not only energized his Republican base, but he appealed to women, blacks, Hispanics, and the elderly. At one point, he lost his voice to laryngitis, so his wife and three grown children had to fill in for him as surrogates. When the ballots were finally counted, Sargent had defeated White by 259,354 votes, representing 56.7 percent of the total, to win his first full term as governor. Much to the chagrin of his opponent, Sargent even carried the city of Boston. After a grueling campaign, having won the corner office in his own right, he was no longer an accidental governor.

The morning after the election, Sargent and White had breakfast together at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Boston. As Sargent recalled, "When we were done, Kevin grabbed for the bill," and said, "I know goddamn well you're not going to pay for this."<sup>21</sup> Sargent enjoyed jousting with Irish Democrats, and as a Yankee Republican he made an easy target for them. The governor was adept at playing ethnic politics. He was especially fond of attending the annual Saint Patrick's Day brunch at Dorgan's restaurant in South Boston hosted by state senator William Bulger, a stand-up comedian in his own right. Both men enjoyed roasting each other in a good-natured way. This breakfast of corned beef and cabbage was a ritual of Irish-American political culture. While campaigning in certain neighborhoods, like Boston's North End, Sargent never failed to mention his Italian grandmother. He also boasted of his membership in the Braintree Lodge of the Sons of Italy, which further cemented his relations with the Italian population of the state.

Sargent governed more by the sheer force of his personality than by any grant of formal authority. In many ways, his personality matched his politics. He enjoyed marching in parades, slapping backs, pumping hands, and hanging out with Irish politicians who loved to needle him. Kevin White once commented that Sargent was the best he had ever seen in a parade, that he could make eye contact with every man, woman, and child along the parade route.<sup>22</sup> He was a relatively simple man, not complex or Machiavellian. David Nyhan, one of the most perceptive commentators on the Massachusetts political scene, drew this portrait of him:

What the political community prized most in Frank Sargent was the laughter. No politician of his rank had more fun in office, as often at his own expense as at another's. He was not a complicated man, of twisted psyche, inner turmoil, or desperate ambition. Frank was Frank: a beautiful man, a solid friend, an able leader, an honest public servant. And a million laughs. What's not to prize in such a splendid fellow?<sup>23</sup>

Having risen through the ranks of the fish-and-game and the public works bureaucracies, Sargent brought twenty-two years of experience in government to the task. The only thing he lacked was legislative experience, but this proved to be more of a political asset than a liability. He knew a lot about how government worked and who all the key players were. This knowledge and experience, coupled with his determination to lead rather than follow, made him a different kind of governor.

Looking back at the social and economic conditions that existed in the Bay State during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the political situation was clearly manipulable from the vantage point of someone like Sargent. He believed that there was no point in



holding power unless it could be used effectively. Furthermore, he recognized the social ferment and discontent that were brewing in Massachusetts and understood the reasons that caused people to press for social change. He used the bully pulpit whenever he thought it necessary, but he seldom preached to people. There is ample evidence to suggest that constituency and leader were attuned to each other's calculations.

Toward the end of his second term, however, Sargent would come to recognize that the magic had gone out of the enterprise. A booming economy had enabled him to create and expand programs without major tax increases until his final year. In October 1973, the economy began to falter with the disruption of oil supplies, which was compounded by rising unemployment and double-digit inflation, or what became known as "stagflation." Sargent's star was sinking fast and with it any grand notions of a third term. In his bid for reelection in 1974, he faced a formidable Democratic opponent in Michael Dukakis, who appealed to the same constituencies that Sargent had cultivated.

But as the campaign wore on, Sargent seemed to stumble and became preoccupied with falling public opinion polls and day-to-day crises. Not only had he drifted away from his conservative Republican base, he had also antagonized it. A big flap was made about his borrowing \$40,000 from his wife to finance his campaign, violating the provisions of a recently passed campaign-finance law. In typical fashion, Sargent dismissed this disclosure with wry humor. He told the Everett Rotary Club that he was sorry he did not arrive in time for lunch. "I couldn't come up with the price of the ticket," he said solemnly. "Jessie wouldn't lend me the dough."<sup>24</sup>

It turned out to be a hard-fought and bitterly contested campaign. On Election Day, Dukakis garnered 992,284 votes, 53.5 percent of the total, as compared with Sargent's 784,353. Sargent was defeated by factors beyond his control. The Republicans had held the governorship since 1964 and it was time for a change. Sargent shrugged off his defeat by blaming it on "the price of hamburg." As he put it, "I didn't blow my stack at all. I could kind of see it coming."<sup>25</sup> Whether the economy was the substantial cause of his defeat no one can say for certain, but it was surely among the major causes. Racial violence over court-ordered school busing had erupted in Boston in September 1974, just two months prior to the election. Sargent supported the state's Racial Imbalance Act of 1965, and as the chief law enforcement officer, he sent in National Guard troops to quell the civil disturbance.<sup>26</sup> The presence of state troops inflamed passions, especially in South Boston, which became a hotbed of antibusing. Through the ever present lens of network television, the nation watched the ugly upheaval unleashed by the desegregation orders of federal judge Arthur Garrity. To top it off, Watergate, the Nixon pardon, oil shock, and the faltering economy all made 1974 a disastrous year for the Republican Party nationally. Sargent ran about as far ahead of the rest of the Republican ticket as he had in winning a comfortable victory four years earlier, but the outcome this time was a crushing defeat.

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### **The Political Apprenticeship**

Frank Sargent was born on July 29, 1915, in the small rural town of Hamilton, Massachusetts, where the social elite on the North Shore played polo and other equestrian sports. A patrician by birth and disposition, he could lay claim to a sterling Yankee background.

Reared a child of privilege, he was a half cousin to the famous American painter John Singer Sargent. These family credentials gave him impeccable native-born, blue-blood status. Not much is known about his early childhood except that his father died when Frank was only three years old. His maternal grandfather, George Lee, who was a former New England amateur boxing and sculling champion, instilled in him the love of the outdoors. Lee also contributed to the future political fortunes of his grandson by marrying an Italian woman, Eva Ballarini.

Sargent and his brother grew up in a family without a father or one they would never come to know. The family had an Irish nurse who helped to raise the two boys. This set of circumstances may explain psychologically why the future governor needed to make friends and later why he got along so well with Irish politicians. His mother eventually married Arthur Adams. The Adams family, direct descendants of President John Quincy Adams, were quite conservative while the Sargents were very liberal. There were tensions between the two families. Young Frank Sargent was sent to the exclusive Noble and Greenough School in Dedham, where he developed his social graces and prepared for college. There he wanted everybody to be his friend, including the teachers and janitors.<sup>27</sup> In 1935, he passed up Harvard, a Brahmin preserve, to study architecture at MIT.

After graduating from MIT in 1939, Sargent joined the prestigious Boston architectural firm of Coolidge, Shepley, Bulfinch and Abbott, apprenticing as a draftsman. For a brief period, he worked as a carpenter to learn the building trades firsthand. He and a MIT classmate opened a small architect's office. Shortly after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Sargent enlisted in the U.S. Army. An accomplished skier, he volunteered as a ski trooper and was assigned to the famed 10th Mountain Division, which trained hard in Colorado for alpine combat. Rising in the ranks from private to captain, he fought in Italy, where he was wounded twice and earned the Purple Heart and Bronze Star. His combat record would later serve him in good stead with veterans groups.

On returning from the war, Sargent devoted himself to his career and to raising a family. The war had changed his outlook on life. Abandoning architecture, he settled in Orleans on Cape Cod to earn a living doing what he loved most, namely, hunting and fishing. In the fall he worked as a duck guide, in the winter he fished commercially for lobster and halibut, and in the spring and summer he ran a charter boat out of Rock Harbor. He also operated a successful sporting goods business and opened the Goose Hummock Shop on Route 6A. One of the shop's early best-sellers was a goose decoy that Sargent had fashioned from cork insulation board and a fishnet float.

Before long, Sargent grew bored with running his business. His advocacy of fishermen would take him into politics. In Rock Harbor he had heard stories about the illegal netting of striped bass. He investigated the matter and started a crusade to stop this abuse. Sargent invited Republican governor Robert Bradford to board his boat and see for himself. He showed Bradford that the current laws were not working properly. Bradford then asked him to become the state's director of marine fisheries in 1947. Sargent agreed to take the job for the winter but remained in the post for almost ten years.

Commercial fishermen were upset by the appointment of a man whom they considered an amateur and dilettante, but Sargent surprised them by shipping out with the Boston trawler fleet and working as one of the crew on the Grand Banks. He also

devoted considerable time speaking to rod-and-gun clubs, garden clubs, Audubon groups, and other conservationists about the dangers of pollution. In Sargent's own words, "I used to be kind of a voice in the wilderness, railing against pollution of our tidal waters and marshes. Some hunters and fishermen listened, but others were more interested in how many trout you were going to stock in Round Pond, even though a developer might pollute the pond."<sup>28</sup> (Interestingly, this occurred before Rachel Carlson had written *Silent Spring*, which was published in 1962.)

From 1959 to 1962, Sargent went to Washington to serve as executive director of a temporary federal commission on recreational open-space resources. In this capacity, he formed a unique partnership to save the Cape Cod shoreline by creating a new park. It was an auspicious time for such a venture. Alarmed by urban sprawl and the proliferation of housing subdivisions that threatened to change forever the pristine shoreline, Sargent took a lead position in promoting this audacious project. The idea was anathema to many local real estate agents and businessmen who objected on the grounds that they would be hurt financially. Others worried that it would bring a rush of tourists, spoiling the habitat and overrunning their quiet communities. Enlisting the support of U.S. senators John F. Kennedy and Leverett Saltonstall, along with philanthropist Paul Mellon, Sargent overcame fierce, shortsighted local opposition by taking a novel approach to the problem of land protection. Previous national parks had been created by federal land purchases and private funding. To these techniques, the group added a zoning agreement among the six affected localities to set aside the land and limit development. To minimize political opposition, private landowners were allowed to retain ownership of their land for a period of ninety-nine years, but they had to agree not to develop it. On August 7, 1961, President Kennedy signed the law creating the Cape Cod National Seashore, which set aside 44,600 acres of land, including forty miles of shoreline on the Great Beach and ten miles flanking Cape Cod Bay.

On his return to Massachusetts in 1962, Sargent ran unsuccessfully for state senator in Barnstable County. He lost in a Republican primary, mainly for lack of time and poor organization, but he learned from his mistakes. In 1963 he accepted an appointment from Democratic governor Endicott Peabody to serve as an associate commissioner of the Department of Public Works. The DPW had just been reorganized following a major scandal, so this was a fairly visible reform appointment. While undertaking the assignment, he met Al Kramer, who helped him clean up the mess in the scandal-ridden department.

When Republican John Volpe became governor again in 1965, he named Sargent chair of the commission, making him the head of the department. The conservationist had now become a public road builder. In his DPW role, Sargent was responsible for planning and design work on interstate expressway projects, and he led a successful effort to secure legislation eliminating local authority to veto state highway projects. In 1966 Volpe picked Sargent as his running mate, and the rest, as they say, is history.

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### A Maverick Party Leader

Governor Francis Sargent was the chief spokesman for the liberal wing of the state Republican Party. By virtue of his office, he was the leader of his party, half be-



holden to it, sometimes able to bend it to his own vision. Party organization and party discipline were never as strong as some observers remember, but they were influential factors in nominating and electing a governor. Still, the links were not strong. Sargent's liberal views frequently clashed with those of right-wing conservative Republicans. As the years went on, the chasm between the two sides became wide and deep, and they were clearly estranged. A more serious and potentially more damaging chasm appeared among members of the Republican State Committee. Martha Weinberg observed regarding Sargent,

The Republican state committee regarded him with suspicion because of his liberal policies, his appointment of many Democrats to positions in his administration, his refusal to back unilaterally all party candidates, and his lukewarm response to the candidacy of Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew. Sargent, in turn, did not rely heavily on the state Republican party organization but instead built "Governor Sargent Committees" in each county in the state. Although several times he attempted to purge the Republican State Committee of his opponents, he relied on his own organization to attract the Independents and Democrats whom he needed to survive in Massachusetts, where a large majority of registered voters are Democrats and Independents.<sup>29</sup>

Sargent possessed an inner ballast that was absolutely unshakable. He got along better with Democratic legislative leaders than with some members of his own party. This group included House speaker David Bartley and two consecutive Senate presidents, Maurice Donahue and Kevin Harrington. Their power relationships reflected a partial truce in the cultural wars that had long pitted the Irish against the Yankees.

For the moment, however, Sargent had little time for such lofty considerations. At the beginning, their relations were untested. To break the ice, the governor put on his desk a sign that read Don't Ask Me, I Didn't Go to Harvard, and he set about wooing enough Democratic lawmakers to allow him to function. By his own admission, "I pissed off some Republicans, but there was no other way to get anything done."<sup>30</sup> His wooing of Democrats made for prudent politics because it enabled him to get most of his legislative program enacted. He essentially led a coalition government.

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### **Halting the Construction of Boston Expressways**

Immediately on taking office in January 1969, Sargent was confronted by neighborhood and environmental activists seeking to stop five interstate expressway projects scheduled for completion in the Boston metropolitan region. These included the Inner Belt, I-95, I-93, the Southwest Expressway, and the Route 2 extension. The extension of Interstate 95 would have cut through Roxbury, the Back Bay, Cambridge, Somerville, and Charlestown and would have required the demolition of about 3,800 homes. It would have also damaged a natural wildlife and conservation area, Fowl Meadow in the Canton-Milton woods. Many homes of low-income families had already been taken by eminent domain and bulldozed for clearance.<sup>31</sup> With some buildings partially demolished and others completely reduced to rubble, the Southwest Corridor looked like a bombed-out World War II German city.

Since the community organizers had mobilized a large number of poor minorities who marched on the State House, their demands could hardly be ignored. The protest

movement was quite successful, given the redistributive objectives that the protestors were pursuing. Day by day, week by week, media-savvy community groups dominated the public discussion, keeping the issues in their favored frame and putting the Department of Public Works on the defensive.

Cross-pressured, Sargent was cautious in his initial response. After four months, however, he announced that he would appoint a special task force to review pending highway plans for the Boston region. He did not do so until September 1969. To chair the task force, he named Alan Altshuler, a professor of political science at MIT, who had written on the politics of transportation and planning. The task force included a mix of business leaders, academics, and independent professionals but no one who had taken a public position on the projects in dispute.

In January 1970, Altshuler informed the governor that the task force would recommend a moratorium on the controversial expressways and the development of a new, environmentally sensitive plan for a major highway and mass transit facilities in the Boston area. At the time, no American governor had ever halted work on an interstate expressway. This was truly the meeting of the moment, the man, and the place.

The task force's recommendations touched off an intense, month-long debate that the governor structured with his inner circle. Donald Dwight opposed the moratorium; Al Kramer favored it. Altshuler, who took a middle-ground position, wanted to kill some, but not all, of the proposed expressways and build the remainder at reduced scale. As Altshuler recalled, "Sargent confided privately that he thought I was very likely right technically, but he did not see who would support my middle-ground position. The pro-highway and anti-highway forces were so polarized that he felt compelled to choose one or the other in clear-cut fashion."<sup>32</sup>

Sargent benefited from the highly politicized context in which policy was being formulated. Facing the electorate that year, he was searching for issues, allies, and liberal credentials for the forthcoming election in which he would emerge the winner. Ironically, Sargent, who had previously been pro-highway, came down squarely on the side of the environmentalists and neighborhood groups. His intuition for the bold stroke was at hand. The solution, he decided, was to call a halt to construction.

On February 11, 1970, Sargent appeared on television to announce his decision publicly. The governor endorsed the task force's recommendations and declared a moratorium on the five expressway projects. His message was simple and compelling. Taking note of his role as former DPW commissioner, he told his viewing audience, "Nearly everyone was sure highways were the only answer to transportation problems for years to come. But we were wrong."<sup>33</sup> In making such a dramatic turn-about, Sargent took a giant step in defining his public image, emphasizing that he cared about the soft side of politics. His critics thought they could see him manipulating the issue for votes.

But Sargent had no money to carry out the recommended planning study, which was necessary if he was to replace the discarded plan with a new one. The task force had estimated a need for \$3.5 million, which the Democratic, pro-highway legislature was not about to provide. The Federal Highway Administration was certain to be hostile. Frank Turner, the federal highway administrator, soon forecast publicly that Boston would strangle on its traffic unless the proposed expressways were built.

Sargent's only hope was that John Volpe might be persuaded to overrule his subordinates, but such persuasion would be most difficult. Volpe as governor had been

fully supportive of the projects to be halted. Sargent had put off informing Volpe of his decision until an hour before he went on television, because he did not want to offer him an opening to argue the issue.

A few days later, Sargent, along with Altshuler and Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority chairman Robert Wood, went to Washington to meet with Volpe in the vice president's office. There was every indication that this meeting would be sensitive. Volpe marched in with his entourage and immediately started lecturing Sargent. He told him that he was listening to the wrong people, then pointed directly at Alan Altshuler. Fortunately, Volpe had his own in-house liberal assistant, Joseph Bosco, whose views were shifting in this peak year of environmentalism. As things turned out, the Massachusetts delegation got the funding they needed.

Sargent won the election and moved ahead with the Boston Transportation Planning Review in 1971. Although it ultimately resulted in the cancellation of every major highway project proposed for the Boston metropolitan area, the BTPR process was not intended to achieve such a result. Rather, it was an effort to assess the relative costs and benefits of a variety of strategies for addressing the region's transportation needs.<sup>34</sup> It soon became clear that some projects, including the Inner Belt and the Route 2 extension, could not be built without enormous disruption. Consequently, in December 1971, Sargent dropped both roads from further consideration.<sup>35</sup>

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### **Calming an Antiwar Protest**

As the Vietnam War and resistance to it escalated, it became increasingly difficult to keep the peace at home. Antiwar demonstrations and protests were common occurrences. When the young rebelled against the accustomed norms, the reaction was often severe. Older generations of Americans, especially those who had served in World War II and Korea, were outraged by what they perceived as the rejections of patriotism. Most governors in America responded to these crises by sending antiriot squads into the streets, often using tear gas and billy clubs. With a Republican president in the White House, Sargent was the first Republican governor to come out against the war. His support of the Shea bill was a litmus test.<sup>36</sup> Yet, in response to an urgent request from Harvard president Nathan Pusey, the governor ordered state police to break up the occupation of University Hall. Several students were arrested and sent to jail.

In 1970, when the Ohio National Guard killed students at Kent State University, the pot was boiling over on campuses across the country. In Boston, thousands of angry students descended upon the State House and held an antiwar rally. One of their speakers demanded that the American flag be lowered to half mast as a tribute to those slain at Kent State. Shouts of "lower the flag" rippled through the surging crowd and soon reached a crescendo. Two frightened capitol policemen stood guard at the flagpole.

This scene set the stage for what followed. Looking out the window of his corner office, Sargent asked his staff what would happen to the capitol police if the flag was not lowered.<sup>37</sup> He realized that they would probably be injured. Since the students were only asking for respect, he ordered Donald Dwight to lower the flag. This statesmanlike gesture averted a near riot and saved the policemen from possible harm. The political task



was one of truly keeping the peace. No one can measure the results of the simplest act performed under such circumstances, but it had a calming effect. The crowd gradually dispersed. As Al Kramer later recalled, "Sargent responded not to the anger, but to the idealism and hope of those times."<sup>38</sup>

Many observers considered the flag incident more as a political statement and publicity stunt than a genuine peace offering. The Democratic hawks in the legislature urged Senate president Maurice Donahue to blast Sargent publicly for having caved in to the student demands. Donahue, who was seeking the Democratic nomination for governor, was fully aware of Sargent's distinguished military combat record in World War II and refused to do so.

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### **Creating a New Cabinet System**

Sargent's administrative style evolved considerably between his first and his second term. During the first, confronted by more than 350 state agencies, Sargent and his staff were able to do little more than paper over crises, set a few initiatives in motion, and nurture Sargent's personal image with the media and electorate. In the first year of Sargent's second term, however, a state cabinet system was created.<sup>39</sup> The legislature had adopted the cabinet system in 1969, deferring its effective date to 1971 on the assumption that a Democrat would win the governorship in 1970. Maurice Donahue was not about to place ten patronage plums at Sargent's disposal. After Sargent prevailed in 1970, the legislature balked for several months at funding the cabinet offices, but finally relented after Sargent mounted an effective media campaign.

The reorganization plan established ten new "super" executive agencies. The cabinet secretaries served at the pleasure of the governor, and their staffs were exempt from civil service. Moreover, their appointments did not require legislative confirmation. They had little statutory authority, but the governor had broad discretion to delegate agency oversight authority to the secretaries. Sargent, using this authority to the fullest, also specified that in those matters which the law required him to act personally, he wanted to be advised by the secretaries rather than directly by their agencies.

Sargent appointed well-qualified people to the top positions in his administration, among them Peter Goldmark, secretary of human services, Charles H. Foster, secretary of environmental affairs, Steven Minter, commissioner of public welfare, Thomas Atkins, commissioner of housing, David Liederman, director of the office of children, and Jack Leff, secretary of elder affairs, to mention only a few. Some of these appointees were Democrats, which did not sit well with hard-line Republicans.

Steven Minter was recruited from Ohio, where he had been director of the welfare department of Cuyahoga County. Sargent wanted him to straighten out the mess that resulted when the state took over the welfare system from the localities in July 1968. The 351 Massachusetts cities and towns were no longer responsible for welfare, but the central office was in shambles. There was no standardized payment system for recipients. Each local office functioned according to the standards of its local director so that there were large discrepancies in records. Saddling the department with the additional task of administering the new Medicaid program simply added to the disarray.

Politicians, depending on their ideological persuasion, wanted to know why recipients were not being paid promptly, why the welfare rolls were increasing, and why ven-

dors of medical services were not being reimbursed. The National Welfare Rights Organization staged several demonstrations to demand increased benefits. Seen against this background, Minter tried his best to maintain the current level of support and services. He restructured welfare in Massachusetts, and the workings of the system in a managerial sense improved. Martha Weinberg concludes:

On most management issues in welfare, the governor was unable to dictate the behavior of the agency or to ensure that it act as he wanted it to act. For the governor and his staff, managing welfare seldom offered the possibility of clear rewards. There was little room for dramatic policy initiation or for intervention that would capture the public imagination. Instead, Sargent faced constraints on his ability to control the department accompanied by constant potential for crisis. This was positive incentive for him to ignore the department whenever possible.<sup>40</sup>

On another front, Sargent appointed political scientist Robert Wood as chairman of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), which seemed to be a natural choice. Wood had just returned from Washington, where he had served first as undersecretary and then secretary of housing and urban development in the Lyndon Johnson administration. In *Suburbia*, Wood wrote that "transportation is the central reality of the metropolitan community."<sup>41</sup> After his tenure at HUD, he received a chance to put his ideas into action locally. On assuming his new post, Wood inquired about the MBTA's equal opportunity office and, to his dismay, found that no such office existed, a situation he brought to Sargent's attention and took steps to remedy. The agency had a history of discriminating against minorities. Wood also oversaw the extension of both the Orange Line and the Red Line. These extensions dramatically transformed communities like Somerville and Quincy. The Red Line extension, which brought Davis Square into being, enabled Tufts University to prosper and allowed graduate students at Harvard and elsewhere to reside in Somerville. The same situation developed in Quincy.<sup>42</sup>

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### The Deinstitutionalization of Mental Patients

Frank Sargent named Peter Goldmark, a twenty-nine-year-old whiz kid, as his secretary of human services. Goldmark had previously served in John Lindsay's New York City administration. One of his policy objectives, shared by Sargent, was to move as many people as possible out of the large human service institutions and into smaller community facilities. Goldmark's strategy relied on forcing bureaucratic agencies to act by applying pressure from constituency groups at the grassroots level.

Whatever its merits, Goldmark's strategy of citizen participation was staunchly resisted by mental health commissioner Milton Greenblatt, who did not favor the concept of deinstitutionalization. This reform, fueled by federal money, was designed to place mental patients in community residences and halfway houses as an alternative to warehousing them in large custodial institutions. Under fire from a citizens' task force on children out of school, Greenblatt stonewalled their efforts to monitor the implementation of Chapter 750, which called for the delivery of mental health and educational services to emotionally disturbed youngsters who were at risk. The commissioner also came under attack from a legislative commission that had investigated the

deaths of four mentally retarded clients at Belchertown. Although an internal probe conducted by the Department of Mental Health absolved Greenblatt of any negligence in the matter, the Lolos commission found him partially responsible and called for his resignation. These events led to his forced departure in December 1972.

After a six-month nationwide search, Sargent replaced Greenblatt with William Goldman, a San Francisco psychiatrist. Goldman set a new direction for the department by allowing the citizen area boards to participate in the budgetary process and by refusing to curry favor with the medical establishment, which was viewed as a sacred cow. He viewed the doctors as stubborn resisters of change and impediments to new policies. Furthermore, he infuriated them by refusing to fund psychiatric residencies at many of the affiliated university hospitals and clinics. Goldman was the original architect of closing the state mental hospitals. Over the years these institutions had suffered from benign neglect and the quality of treatment of patients had steadily deteriorated. Under Goldman's direction, three mental hospitals (Grafton, Gardner, and Foxborough) were closed within a span of three years.<sup>43</sup>

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### **Closing Juvenile Jails**

In October 1969, Sargent appointed Jerome Miller commissioner of youth services. Born in South Dakota in 1932, Miller grew up in Minnesota and attended college in the Midwest. After graduation, he entered a Catholic seminary and spent five years studying for the priesthood. He subsequently left the seminary, joined the U.S. Air Force, and obtained a doctorate in social work. While stationed in England as a psychiatric social worker, he had developed a community treatment program for troubled children of air force personnel.<sup>44</sup>

At the time of his Massachusetts appointment, Miller discovered that nearly one thousand youngsters were incarcerated in juvenile jails or what were commonly known as county training schools. Described in the press as "barbaric relics from an embarrassing past," these institutions were also known for their harsh and inhumane treatment of children. Grim stories of mental cruelties and physical and sexual abuse abounded. Not only that, the Department of Youth Services (DYS) was plagued by controversy and scandal. Most of the staff owed their jobs to political patronage. After two years of attempting to reform DYS from within, Miller concluded that "slow change was no change" and that "we could keep it going as long as we went at it full blast and really kept our heads together around a certain altruism, but no one should have to depend on someone else's altruism. It's too risky."

Miller, dismayed by what he learned, decided to go for broke. He began closing the juvenile detention centers during the late fall of 1971. At the outset, he did not fully apprise the governor of his intentions, but word soon leaked out as the results became known. By mid-January 1972 he had closed all but one of the institutions, and the remaining one, Lancaster, housed a substantially reduced population, about half of whom were participating in a privately run program. The young people were either paroled home, placed in foster homes, or placed in community-based programs or group homes. The new program, which was federally funded, made Massachusetts the first state to eliminate juvenile prisons and attracted the attention of penologists across the nation. DYS spent the remainder of 1972 attempting to cope with the consequences of the closings, to consolidate the new directions for treat-



ment of delinquency, and to ward off mounting opposition from the legislature.

DYS was subjected to intensive legislative investigation and public hearings. This powerful oversight was led by Westfield Democrat Robert McGinn, a former police officer, who engaged in a bitter feud with Miller. After a shouting match at the State House, McGinn yelled to reporters, "I'll bury Miller. He's a nut. He's insane. He belongs in an insane asylum."<sup>45</sup> Despite these attacks, Miller had strong allies in House speaker David Bartley and state representative John McGlynn of Medford. Better yet, he had the support of Jessie Sargent, who had a keen interest in the issue and was a strong public advocate for closing juvenile detention centers. He also had the support of the *Boston Globe*. Miller would never have been able to accomplish what he did without the help of these allies.

Miller resigned as commissioner of DYS in January 1973 to take a similar position in Ohio. His departure met with reactions as varied as those he had aroused throughout his stormy thirty-nine months in office. The governor accepted his resignation with public regret; the *Boston Globe* offered effusive praise; the speaker of the House lamented the administrative chaos he had left behind; and the legislature began yet another investigation.

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### **The Park Plaza Urban Renewal Project**

In early 1971, the Boston Redevelopment Authority proposed the construction of a \$266 million urban renewal project in downtown Boston. The Park Plaza project, adjacent to the Boston Public Garden, contained some of the most valuable real estate in the city.<sup>46</sup> This economic development project, which was viewed by the news media as Mayor Kevin White's baby, was to be privately financed without any federal aid. One of the two private developers involved in the project was real estate tycoon Mortimer Zuckerman, a close friend of the mayor.

Under state law, local urban renewal projects required the approval of the Department of Community Affairs (DCA). On May 4, 1972, Sargent appointed Miles Mahoney its commissioner. Mahoney had previously served as the director of the Philadelphia Housing Authority. A month later, on June 9, the new commissioner turned down the Park Plaza project on the grounds that the site, which included portions of the tawdry Combat Zone, did not meet the "blight" criterion of the law. Mahoney's finding sparked a heated controversy. His opponents derisively commented that the blight was not the right blight.

Then came the public outcry. Mayor White vigorously objected and filed home rule legislation designed to circumvent the need for state approval. At the time, Sargent was in the process of killing the major highways around Boston. In a period of inflation and high unemployment, he could ill afford to kill all economic development projects. The administration desperately needed a political trophy. Disagreements and disappointments were initially glossed over. Al Kramer tried his best to resolve the dispute, but to no avail. Negotiations were at a standstill.

A revised proposal was submitted to Mahoney, who once again rejected it. He remained resolute in his opposition and refused to back down, but there were repercussions. Both the business community and organized labor got into the act. Some 10,000 angry construction workers marched on the State House to voice their protests. The battle, which took on a momentum of its own and grew in intensity, reflected the stresses

and strains in the administration.

On November 29, 1972, Sargent decided to overrule his DCA commissioner and to push ahead with the project. Soon afterward the governor fired Mahoney for being too parochial and rigid and appointed Louis Crampton to replace him. A special irony lay in the fact that the Park Plaza project was never built. Instead, the state constructed a huge transportation building on the site.

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### **Hiring and Firing a Corrections Commissioner**

Prison reform aroused considerable public attention and controversy in Massachusetts in December 1971. The prison uprising in Attica, New York, and its brutal suppression by excessive police force had already shocked the nation. It was a rude awakening that sparked a similar prison uprising at Walpole. As a consequence of this disturbance, Massachusetts corrections commissioner John Fitzpatrick resigned. The Sargent administration conducted an extensive search for a new commissioner dedicated to prison reform and community-based correctional programs. The governor's staff was seeking someone who could bridge the gap between inmates and the community at large. The selection committee chose three finalists from a list of twenty names. Sargent interviewed each of them and picked John O. Boone.<sup>47</sup>

A career civil servant, Boone was a forty-nine-year-old black man from Atlanta who had been the warden of the federal penitentiary at Lorton, Virginia. Although he worked at the considerable disadvantage of being from the South, his race proved even more of an impediment in a department that was almost entirely white. Sargent and Goldmark did not set out looking for a black commissioner, but when they found a likely black candidate, they believed he might be better able to relate to inmates, a large percentage of whom were black. Long persuaded that the Department of Corrections (DOC) was an ossified and intransigent bureaucracy, they wanted someone who would shake things up. The governor told Boone that he would have "two good years" to implement his programs. "I knew very well, when I appointed him, there was going to be hell to pay," Sargent said, "and there sure was."<sup>48</sup>

The prison world was complex and brutal. Murders, robberies, rapes, and other forms of brutality occurred between inmates, toward staff, and staff to inmates. On taking office, Boone promptly removed the superintendents at Walpole and Norfolk and replaced them with wardens from outside the state. DOC personnel were very unhappy that he had recruited outside the system. Obviously, Boone wanted to improve conditions within the prisons and to reduce the inmate population, but he seriously underestimated the countervailing power of the guards and their labor union.

To the outrage of prison guards, Boone allowed the inmates the right to organize and to participate in some aspects of prison management. As a result of these actions, the guards believed they were in grave physical danger. They were infuriated by what they perceived as a loss of discipline and control of the prisoners. From their perspective, they had been stripped of their authority and relegated to opening and closing the cell gates.

The appointment of Boone ignited a firestorm of protest, stirring emotions on all sides. As the leading figure of prison reform, Boone was out in front on the issue and

hence the lightning rod for criticism. The *Boston Herald* launched a concerted campaign to discredit him. Articles detailing the chaos and disorder that prevailed in the prisons appeared each week. These stories were advanced so vigorously that the governor's press secretary, Tom Reardon, openly questioned their fairness and accuracy.

The political fallout from the *Boston Herald* stories had the immediate effect of putting Boone on notice that his job was in jeopardy. It also generated a barrage of criticism from legislators who were being pressured by the guards. Alarmed by the disorder, Senate president Kevin Harrington felt that the situation had become dangerously out of hand. Soon editorials calling for firing Boone were being published.

Under intense fire, Boone had to manage a different and more demanding organizational change. While he had his detractors, he also had his defenders. A coalition of interested citizens, including prison reform advocates, leaders in the black community, ex-offender groups, and several liberal legislators, staunchly defended him. Democratic state senator Jack Backman of Brookline was among his most ardent supporters. As far as these people were concerned, Boone was doing what needed to be done. The governor showed him steadfast loyalty and declared as much in the press.

Tensions at Walpole remained high and violence among the inmates erupted again. On March 17, 1972, Walpole exploded into another major riot that resulted in considerable damage. Responding to what became known as the Saint Patrick's Day riot, Boone announced a new training program for the guards and asserted that it would take \$1.3 million dollars to turn the corrections system around. Shortly after this outburst, a riot occurred at the women's prison in Framingham. Boone dismissed its new superintendent, only to reinstate her when the guards threatened a walkout. Protected by civil service rules, she could not be fired without adequate cause.

Meanwhile, Sargent filed his Omnibus Correctional Reform bill on February 9, 1972, as one of his "most important pieces of legislation" for that session. Its central provisions were logical and linked: halfway houses, work and education release, furloughs, prison industries, county jail standards, ex-offenders eligible for correction jobs, and so on. Sargent contributed to the reform effort by placing the prestige of his office behind it and utilizing his talents in public relations to overcome political obstacles. The omnibus bill was passed in July 1972, owing in large measure to the cooperation of speaker David Bartley, who quietly slipped the bill through the House without much debate.

A series of dreadful events combined to dramatize the dangerous situation in the prisons and to seal the commissioner's fate. These included the killing of two prison guards by a Norfolk inmate; another inmate killed himself when his homemade bomb accidentally exploded; the inmates at Concord doused the prison chaplain with gasoline, but state police came to the rescue before they could immolate him; and a convicted murderer killed again while on furlough. The guards, traumatized by these horrific events, especially the murders of their fellow guards, staged a one-day sickout in protest. Sargent attended the funerals where he received a hostile reception. The guards publicly branded him a murderer. Unaccustomed to such abusive treatment, he was deeply shaken. He recalled:

But to go to a funeral and as far as you can see, a line on either side of the church, of corrections officers in uniform from around our state and from surrounding states, from Rhode Island and elsewhere. And to walk into the church and you get the rumble of a



boo. And I tried to shake hands with a couple and I got "Go on, f—k you!," and all that kind of stuff, outside the church. It was a little unnerving to go in and sit in the front pew with the casket and a woman comes over to beat your brains in, that gets to be tough. Also you have the television cameras noting that and that doesn't play very well on the news.<sup>49</sup>

In the meantime, the savage attacks on Boone continued. Cumulatively, these assaults pushed a political hot button and made his firing almost inevitable. For Sargent, under incredible pressure, especially with his reelection campaign less than a year away, the situation was deteriorating fast.

By the spring of 1973, the governor's staff and Goldmark realized that Boone had to go. They were convinced that he was a weak administrator and that his continued presence jeopardized the entire reform program. Goldmark felt that if Boone was going under, there was no point in wasting any more currency on him. Despite his public pronouncements, Sargent was not disposed to tolerate further chaos, which had taken its toll. The time of genuine reckoning had arrived. Sargent explained:

The main reason the whole corrections thing became very tough wasn't merely the fact we had some violence, somebody killed, the fact we had a strike and all that sort of stuff. It was the day-to-day pressure from the newspapers. When you're in public life and you get a few bad headlines it isn't all that much fun, but when you get them day after day after day and week after week after week, then it gets rugged and you have to do something about it.<sup>50</sup>

In the end, Sargent capitulated, but it was not an easy choice for him. He had great respect for Boone and knew how much the commissioner had suffered during the long ordeal. Once Sargent decided to fire him, the question became how to do so without appearing to surrender to the anti-Boone forces.

On the evening of June 20, 1973, the governor went on television and announced his decision. The tone of his speech was conciliatory. He felt it was important to praise Boone and his cause, even as he fired him. The stormy Boone era was over.

Ultimately, the governor replaced Boone with Frank A. Hall, who was deputy commissioner of the North Carolina Department of Prisons. Before long, Hall restored peace to Walpole and the other prisons. He succeeded in keeping the prisons relatively safe and orderly, while cautiously implementing his package of reforms.

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### **Sargent versus Dukakis**

It is interesting to compare Francis Sargent with Michael Dukakis. In many respects, they were the antithesis of each other, offering a vivid contrast between the pragmatist and the idealist, the affable honest broker and the detached policy wonk. Sargent was more friendly and less driven than Dukakis. They took an instant dislike to each other at their first meeting. The two governors differed sharply in style and personality. Where Dukakis was cold, aloof, and arrogant, Sargent displayed warmth, charm, and a remarkable lack of arrogance; where Dukakis was stiff, self-righteous, and a paragon of virtue, Sargent was relaxed, flamboyant, and profane; where Dukakis was viewed as a technocrat and a know-it-all, Sargent was perceived as a good listener who reached out for the views of others. Dukakis was almost devoid of a sense of humor and therefore unable to empathize and soothe chafed egos the way Sargent did.

About the only characteristic the two men shared was their personal frugality.

While Sargent had his strengths, he also had his weaknesses. He hated to fire people — his most painful task was firing John Boone. He also had difficulty relating to blacks. As a public manager, Sargent did not focus on details and had a short attention span nor did he become absorbed in economic development. He was bored by fiscal and administrative issues. He recognized their importance in principle and appointed excellent people to handle them, but he assigned them little priority and preferred not to learn much about them. Hence, he chose not to heed the Cassandra-like warnings of his budget director and left his successor, Michael Dukakis, a large deficit estimated to be somewhere around \$200 million.

Sargent's style was diametrically opposite to that of his nemesis. His centralized management ran directly counter to Dukakis's hands-on managerial style. Altshuler puts it even more crisply: "Sargent felt comfortable delegating, and he had no apparent sense of competitiveness with his appointees. He viewed himself as a conductor rather than star soloist and delighted in surrounding himself with talent."<sup>51</sup> Dukakis was more the star soloist who found it difficult to delegate. Advised of his shortcomings, the "Duke" attempted to change his image with a makeover. After losing the governorship to Edward King in 1978, he won it back in 1982 by convincing voters that he was a new, humble, more mellow figure ready to listen. There are many styles of leadership, so this is not to say that one style is better than another; but there are significant differences.

With due adjustment for contrasts in their style, character, and personality, there was a final dissimilarity. Sargent did not have an ideological center, which gave him a broader range in decision making. He was oriented to make judgments case by case. Like a classic manager, he retained the facts long enough to make a decision, then purged his mind of them. What emerged over time was a governor who consistently protected the weak underdog and the environmentalists while acting in ways that kept him in tune with the populace. Did Sargent change in any important sense the way governors make their decisions? Close observers of gubernatorial policy conclude that he did. Alan Altshuler sums up:

Sargent, in short, was a man of politics and concrete decisions. While resistant to ideology in the abstract, his decisions expressed a consistent set of liberal values. His interest in management was confined, in general, to selecting key personnel and inspiring their loyalty. He was a reactive decision-maker in most circumstances, one who responded to crises and chose from among the options brought to him by staff. But he also gave the highest priority to recruiting a diverse and talented staff; he could be extremely patient when they needed time to generate fresh options; and he was willing to take major risks on behalf of policies about which he cared deeply. He had his blind spots, most notably in those areas where fiscal and administrative detail count for a lot. But he led an exciting administration with unfailing decency, compassion and integrity.<sup>52</sup>

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## The Sargent Legacy

Frank Sargent was respected and admired on Beacon Hill, where he earned a reputation for objectivity and wise judgment. To this day, Democrats and Republicans still speak fondly of him. Reflecting on his own experience, former House speaker David Bartley remarked, "Frank Sargent was one of the finest human beings I've ever met, and certainly

the best governor I've served under."<sup>53</sup> Former Senate president Kevin Harrington put it somewhat differently, "Sargent had great instincts. He had a political piano tuner's ear; he had perfect pitch. He could smell whether an idea was good, great, or bad."<sup>54</sup>

To his credit, Sargent took more stand-up positions on legislation than most of his predecessors, and in his six years he received the highest percentage of bipartisan support. Add to the legislative record the policy innovations introduced through executive orders, gubernatorial memoranda, and rules and regulations, and the record is even more impressive. He was the first governor to address the manifold problems of urban life. His cabinet plan matched the best organizational theory of the decade. No other Republican leader in Massachusetts had so consciously and successfully developed a strategy for involving experts and academics in the various stages of policymaking. Many of his appointments were bold and courageous.

As historians struggle with the Sargent legacy, they will no doubt remember him for his balanced transportation policy and his policy option of deinstitutionalization. Whatever the verdict on specific policies, they will remember him most of all as an environmental visionary. He did more for the cause of the environment than any of his predecessors and successors.

But Sargent was not an original thinker or a great idea person. He relied on Al Kramer, Robert Yasi, and others to feed him ideas. They were a dependable policy source. His wife, Jessie, was the driving force behind Jerome Miller and the mental health efforts. Of the many participants who influenced policy and programs, the governor's staff and the *Boston Globe* played an invaluable role. Sargent had a good working relationship with the publishers of the *Globe* as well as with other media allies.

In *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, Ronald Heifetz distinguishes between leaders who presume that their responsibility is to make decisions and leaders who help others to confront problems. Sargent clearly falls into the latter category. He believed in participatory democracy and sought to develop ways of having ordinary people get involved in making critical decisions that affected their lives deeply. Such a phenomenon was entirely new in state politics. Until Sargent came along, the question of empowering nonestablishment groups remained largely unexplored and undefined.

One of Sargent's most important legacies was the extent to which he reshaped the state's judiciary. He filled ninety-seven judgeships, both at the district and at the superior court levels. This large number of vacancies was the result mainly of a new law that required judges to retire at age seventy. William Young, the governor's legal counsel, was largely responsible for coordinating this effort. While patronage considerations were taken into account in appointing district court judges, the same was not true with regard to superior court judges, who were chosen strictly on merit. Since there were only a few blacks on the bench, diversity was also a factor. Sargent appointed David Nelson, a highly respected black lawyer, to the superior court. Nelson later became a federal district court judge. Overall, the quality of Sargent's judicial appointments was of the highest rank.

Frank Sargent died on October 22, 1998, at the age of eighty-three. The *Boston Globe* published an editorial that captured both his political and his personal legacy. It is worth quoting at length:



Francis W. Sargent always acted as if his six years as governor were the most enjoyable accident that could befall a man. "I got a hell of a big kick out of it," he told the *Globe's* John Powers this summer.

The sentiment was mutual. Nearly everyone at the State House from 1969 to 1975 drew on Sargent's infectious sense of enjoyment. This included his top lieutenants as well as the Democratic leaders in the Legislature. If he had an afternoon meeting with House Speaker David Bartley, Sargent said, he would put out a press release in the morning blasting him for something or other just so the meeting would start off on the right foot.

But he did not see politics as a game of tricks requiring deception and guile. He was a most straightforward political executive, taking on issues with boldness and, often, vision. He presided during a period of significant transition, when the state was implementing its takeover of welfare from the cities and towns and was also taking more responsibility for funding local education and school construction.

One of his most memorable actions was stopping construction of the planned Inner Belt of highways. His appointments were superior; his Cabinet is widely viewed as the best of the modern era, with the possible exception of the Cabinet in Michael Dukakis's third term.

Sargent, an architect by training and a fisherman by choice, would laugh at attempts to list his accomplishments, but they were considerable. The fact that he made the state feel good in the process is a legacy to be treasured, and remembered.<sup>55</sup>

Frank Sargent made substantial progress in solving the problems that the citizens of Massachusetts faced, a goal that had eluded his predecessors. Single-minded and secure in his convictions, he responded effectively to contentious social issues. Several decades later, such issues still generate controversy. He made his share of mistakes, but he also made adjustments and moved on. Despite the fact that his career ended in defeat, he made a significant impact on the governorship itself. By seizing the policy initiative and exercising vigorous leadership, he broke the mold and turned the governor's office into an instrument for social change. That is his most enduring legacy. ❀

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## Notes

1. For a good analysis of the development of the office, see Victoria Schuck, "The Massachusetts Governorship: Hamstrung by History?" in Robert R. Robbins, ed., *The Role of the Governor in Massachusetts* (Medford, Mass.: Tufts University, 1961), 11–75. See also Leslie Lipson, *The American Governor from Figurehead to Leader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939).
2. For governors who presided in the Bay State during this period, see Robert C. Wood and Bradbury Seasholes, "The Image of the Governor as a Public and Party Leader," in *ibid.*, 77–100. The authors interviewed five living former governors, namely, Channing H. Cox, Leverett Saltonstall, Robert F. Bradford, Christian A. Herter, and Foster Furcolo. They began their first terms of office in 1921, 1939, 1947, 1953, and 1957, respectively.
3. Interview with William Sargent, December 22, 1998.
4. Frank Phillips, "Ex-foes Recall a Man of Charm, Wit," *Boston Globe*, October 23, 1998.
5. Jessie F. Sargent, *The Governor's Wife* (Boston: Marlborough House, 1973), vii.
6. John Powers, "Sargent at Ease," *Boston Globe*, October 1, 1998.
7. Robert H. Boyle, "Maverick Head of an Odd State," *Sports Illustrated*, April 22, 1974, 51.
8. Sargent, *The Governor's Wife*, 48, 59.

9. William Sargent interview.
10. Douglas Foy told this story at the memorial service for Frank Sargent, Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church, Wellesley, Massachusetts, November 4, 1998.
11. Jay Williams, letter to the editor, *Boston Globe*, November 1, 1998.
12. Interview with Richard Manley, November 5, 1998.
13. Boyle, "Maverick Head of an Odd State," 58.
14. Powers, "Sargent at Ease."
15. William Sargent interview.
16. Interview with Alan Altshuler, December 10, 1998.
17. Alan Altshuler, "Sarge in Charge," *Journal of State Government* 63 (July/August 1989): 156.
18. Martha Weinberg, *Managing the State* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), 54–55. This excellent study, which I have relied on heavily, treats Sargent's governorship in detail. However, I disagree with Weinberg when it comes to the Department of Mental Health. During his watch, Sargent exerted significant executive control over DMH, especially with regard to deinstitutionalization and the closing of three state mental hospitals.
19. Boyle, "Maverick Head of an Odd State," 50–58.
20. See Charles Kenney and Robert L. Turner, *Dukakis: An American Odyssey* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), 70.
21. Powers, "Sargent at Ease."
22. Ken Hartnett, "The Compleat Political Angler — He Lures Voters with Warmth," *Boston Globe*, November 3, 1974.
23. David Nyhan, "An Able Leader and a Great Guy," *Boston Globe*, October 23, 1998.
24. Hartnett, "The Compleat Political Angler."
25. Powers, "Sargent at Ease."
26. Interview with Al Kramer, December 8, 1998. Kramer contends that Governor Sargent sent in troops more as a defensive than an offensive measure.
27. William Sargent interview.
28. Boyle, "Maverick Head of an Odd State," 52.
29. Weinberg, *Managing the State*, 46.
30. John Powers, "Francis W. Sargent, Ex-governor, Dies," *Boston Globe*, October 23, 1998.
31. For a useful, if highly partisan account of the highway controversy up to 1970, see Alan Lupo et al., *Rites of Way* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971). This study is a parochial advocacy piece that chronicles the dispute up to the point of the moratorium and leaves off with the question of what should be done next.
32. Altshuler, "Sarge in Charge," 160.
33. Lupo et al., *Rites of Way*, 106.
34. For a good analysis of the Boston Transportation Planning Review, see Ralph A. Gakenheimer, *Transportation Planning as Response to Controversy: The Boston Case* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976).
35. See David Luberoff, Alan Altshuler, and Christie Baxter, *Mega-Project: A Political History of Boston's Multibillion Dollar Artery/Tunnel Project* (Cambridge: Taubman Center for State and Local Government, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1994), 14.
36. For a detailed account of Sargent's opposition to the Vietnam War and his rationale for supporting the so-called Shea bill, see Francis W. Sargent, "The Issue Is Joined," in *The People vs. Presidential War*, compiled and edited by John M. Wells with Maria Wilhelm (New York: Dunellen Company, 1970), 133–135.
37. Al Kramer interview.
38. See the eulogy delivered by Al Kramer at the Frank Sargent memorial service.
39. See Report of the Modernization Systems Unit, "Management Systems for Massachusetts," June 1971, and Robert Casselman, "State Reorganization: Hoax or Hope," *Boston Globe*, January 14, 1973.
40. Weinberg, *Managing the State*, 141.
41. Robert C. Wood, *Suburbia* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), 246–252.
42. Interview with Robert C. Wood, November 18, 1998.
43. For a more detailed account of this episode, see Richard A. Hogarty, "Downsizing the Massachusetts Mental Health System," *New England Journal of Public Policy* 12, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1996): 26–27.
44. The following account is based primarily on a case study by Stephanie Gould, "Jerome Miller

- and the Department of Youth Services," Parts A and B (Cambridge: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1976).
45. See the editorial "Politics and Children," *Boston Globe*, April 12, 1972.
46. The following account relies heavily on a case study by Colin S. Diver, "Park Plaza," Parts A, B, and C (Cambridge: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1975).
47. This and the following paragraphs follow closely a case study prepared by Alan Konefsky et al., "Massachusetts Department of Correction," Parts 1, 2, and 3 (Cambridge: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1977).
48. Ibid., Part 2, 4.
49. Ibid., 19.
50. Ibid., Part 3, 9.
51. Altshuler, "Sarge in Charge," 158.
52. Ibid., 159.
53. Powers, "Francis W. Sargent, Ex-governor, Dies."
54. Letter from Kevin Harrington, January 4, 1999.
55. Editorial, *Boston Globe*, October 23, 1998.





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